

Bandwagon

THE JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2007



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Vol. 51. No. 1

FRED D. PFENING, JR.

Fred D. Pfening III, Managing Editor

January-February 2007

EDITOR AND PUBLISHER

Bandwagon, The Journal of the Circus Historical Society, Inc. (USPS 406-390) (ISSN 0005-4968), is published bi-monthly by the Circus Historical Society, Inc., 1075 West Fifth Ave., Columbus, OH 43212-2691. Periodicals Postage Paid at Columbus, OH. Postmaster: Send address changes to Bandwagon, 1075 West Fifth Ave., Columbus, OH 43212-2691.

Editorial, advertising and circulation office is located at 2515 Dorset Rd., Columbus, OH 43221. Phone (614) 294-5361. Advertising rates are: Full page \$100, half page \$60, quarter page \$35. Minimum ad \$25.

Bandwagon, new membership and subscription rate: \$40.00 per year in the United States; \$44.00 per year in Canada and outside United States. Single copies \$4.00 plus \$2 postage. Please direct all concerns regarding address changes and lack of delivery to the editor.

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THE FRONT COVER

On 19 September 1872 the Howes' Great London Circus and Sanger's Menagerie of Trained Animals, then in its second year, rolled into Morrisville, Vermont where this stereoscopic picture was taken.

Called the Car of India, this wagon was built in England where we first find it in 1870 on Howes and Cushing's American Circus, then unsuccessfully touring the island. The gilded elephant and its keepers were mounted on a telescoping device that was raised and lowered. The rich, dense carvings, covering even the wheel hubs, are distinctively English.

This picture's colorization is based on period lithographs and newspaper accounts. Fred D. Pfening III collection.

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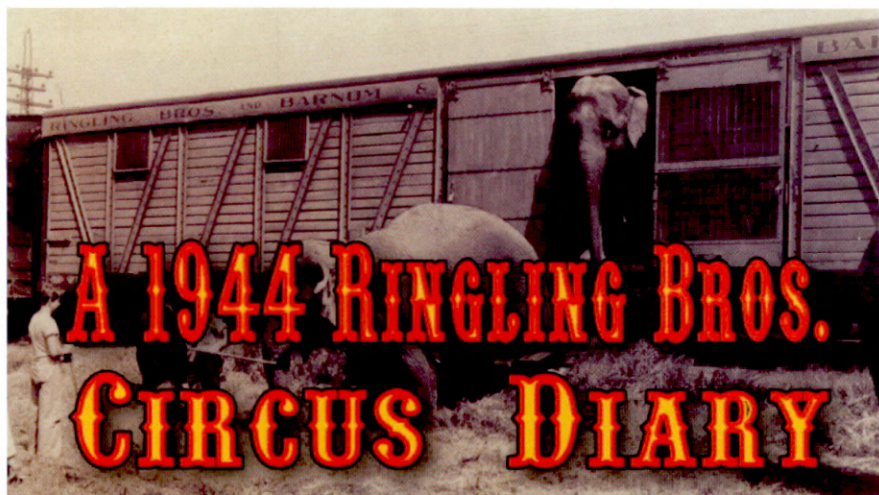
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By the Ralph Emersons

"Well, now for some real hot news and I do mean hot," wrote Ralph Emerson Sr. to his brother George on July 22, 1944. "It all has to do with the Ringling Show fire in Hartford, but let's start at the beginning. As you perhaps know, Ralph Jr. graduated from High School on June 9th and he was eighteen years old on June 18th. He will have to go into the army in a few weeks more. So several weeks before he graduated, I asked him what he wanted to do most before going into the service and he said he wanted to travel with the circus. I accordingly contacted Curly Shaefer who as you know is Boss Elephant man on the Ringling Show, and told him what young Ralph wanted to do. So he said you send him to me and I'll see that he's taken good care of. Well, on the 11th of June we sent him off to Philadelphia to take on the show and he has been working Bulls ever since. Curly said he is a real worker and the lad is liked by everyone on the show. Many 'old-timers' learning that he is your nephew, have gone over and

The new big top in Philidelphia, from a series of photos taken by Robert D. Good on June 11. Pfening Archives.



introduced themselves to him. He is going to stay with the show in quarters until he has to go up for his army physical which is just a few weeks away."

The Second World War was in full swing--the Allies had just invaded Normandy on June 6--and young Ralph was eligible to be drafted at any time. He had the family circus bug. His own father Ralph Sr. ran away as a boy with Sig Sautelle's mud show--at least until his brother Gus dragged him back. But two more brothers ran off, and now all three of Ralph's uncles had Ringling connections. Gus Emerson proudly kept two dapple-gray Ringling horses at his Massachusetts riding stable; Walter Emerson had worked elephants on Jones Bros. in California and spent a season or two as a Ringling big-top usher; and Ralph's hero George Emerson, the one who got the letter above, had worked elephants on Ringling, married a circus rider, and become the studio animal trainer at MGM in Hollywood. (He did their roaring-lion logo.)

Young Ralph grew up working draft horses in South Glastonbury,

Connecticut, an orchard, dairy, and tobacco town a few miles down the river from Hartford. During high school he tore around on a bay saddle horse named Ranger, and the year-book staff summed up his interests as "Horses and horses and talking about horses." When he graduated on June 9, 1944, his gifts included a luminous-dial wristwatch from his parents and a five-year diary from his Auntie Midge, its blue leather cover stamped "A Line a Day" in gold. Morning after next, Ralph strapped on the watch, packed the diary in a black tin suitcase with his clothes, shaving kit, and harmonica; put on his Stetson fedora, and left for an eight-week tour with the Ringling



Ralph on Ranger, with Stetson hat. All photos are from the author's collection, unless otherwise credited.

Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Combined Shows. Sixty-two years later, he sat down with his own son, also named Ralph, and fleshed out the story of his circus summer. The sentences and phrases scattered below in quotation marks are his exact words from their conversations.¹

Fri., June 9. So. Glast. Conn.
Got out of High School, & had my birthday ahead of time.

Sat., June 10. So. Glastonbury.
Ranger went to the Army.

The Connecticut Governor's Horse Guard agreed to take him on loan "for the duration" of the war, saying

he was so good-looking that he'd "make a fine officer's horse." They picked him up in a horse van at the Pratt barn next door and took him to their stable in West Hartford, leaving his owner free to travel.

Sun., June 11. Philidela Penn. Arrived at the Show & Shaffer took me around. Slept in my first train (Conn. No. 70).

After a railroad trip from Hartford, Ralph found a trolley outside the Philadelphia train station, "asked the conductor where the circus was," and rode to the Ringling lot "at Erie and G Street," arriving "in time for supper." Boss elephant man Curly Schafer introduced him around the cooktent, "sizing me up," and then offered him any animal job he wanted. They toured all the departments: the big cats with their private butcher shop, the elephants ("bulls"), the camels and giraffes and other menagerie animals, and the "ring stock" tents with their hundred-plus performing horses. Ralph settled on elephants. "It just clicked. There's something about an elephant--their personalities are so strong." After the evening show, the bull hands took him to the Ringlings' train, where he got a berth on the "Connecticut," the Elephant Department's red sleeping car. No radios and no air conditioning, but lots of cigarettes, and "smoke all over the place."

Mon., June 12. Well I really started shoveling. I also started to work the Bulls. It sure is hot today.

Tues., June 13. Its hot again. Did the usual things in the morning & led 2 bulls in Spect by myself. Once I got stepped on. This & last night I slept out.

Inside the 1944 Ringling big top. Pfening Archives.



The ten-day layover in Philadelphia was a good place for a novice to pick up the show's routine. "Breakfast was one of the best things." Each morning the department

bosses handed out three-part meal tickets marked "Breakfast-Dinner-Supper," and a cooktent employee ripped them at the door. Inside, coffee and water stood on each table and aproned waiters took orders, two choices per meal and all the seconds you wanted, on china plates. "What's for breakfast?" "Whaddaya want?" There were "all the usual" choices rotating through the week: pancakes, eggs, and so on. "Oatmeal was a big thing." It was "civilized." Three times a day the lowest workingman "got to sit down and have somebody wait on him." Everyone ate the same food, though not at the same tables: performers and officials ate on red-and-white gingham tablecloths on the "short side" of the dining tent, separated by a canvas wall from the "long side" where the bull hands and other workers ate on oilcloth. The black canvasmens ate in a tent of their own. Feeding the show was a huge task; the cookhouse crew of eighty-four fed an average of 1,106 people each day.

In the Elephant Department, thirty-seven men cared for thirty elephants.² Their schedules revolved around the performances, but the amount of time spent in the ring was tiny, just two ten-minute acts twice a day. Otherwise, the elephants were picketed outdoors or inside the big



menagerie tent. Separate from the big top, the menagerie tent displayed all the non-performing animals that traveled with the circus, a whole zoo's worth: lions

and tigers in their wagons, Gargantua the gorilla, hippos in tanks, camels, giraffes, chimps, monkeys, zebras, and bears. Concession men ("candy butchers") sold snacks and souvenirs in the middle of the tent, and the elephants were tethered along one side. Except for one small African, all the elephants were full-grown Indian females, among them Jewel, Marcella, Trilby, Modoc, Pinto, Big Babe, Little Babe, Sparks Show Babe, and Ruth "the matriarch." Each morning the elephants were mucked out, watered outdoors in canvas troughs filled by the water trucks, and then brought back inside for grain and fresh hay, some of which they ate and some of which they blew onto their backs to shoo away flies.

On his first morning Ralph strolled through the connection from the menagerie tent to look inside the empty big top. Philadelphia was the season's first stand under canvas, and the new tent was said to be the biggest in the world, 450 feet between stake-lines, almost two football fields long. Freshly waterproofed with wax, the great roof swooped up forty-eight feet to the peak, a vast white ceiling held aloft by six center poles and numberless quarter poles. It was huge and quiet, "a great big empty tent, the sunshine shining in on it," the bright canvas dazzling above the grass and sawdust. "It was quite a sight--awesome is the correct word for that, an awesome-size tent."

The circus opened its doors at 1:00, and "the ticket was worth the price." The main gate led directly into the menagerie tent so patrons could look at the animals and buy food and souvenirs before funneling into the big top to wait for the 2:15 performance. Rope lines separated the elephants



from the crowd; a few uniformed elephant men stood "on watch" to keep the elephants and customers on different sides of the rope and answer questions: "How much do they eat?" "Can I feed him?" "Do they bite?" Troublesome elephants were staked farthest back; the others interacted gently with the crowds, and children generally minded their parents' warnings. The canny elephants put out their trunks for peanuts, hid what they got inside, and kept begging from other people until they had a real mouthful.

During the performance, the elephants first appeared in the seventh act, the Panto's Paradise spectacle or "spec" starring the tramp clown Emmett Kelly. The tramp's paradise is Sleep, and Kelly's drowsy Panto dreamed a pink-hued dream of showgirls and elephants. At the start, Kelly's double went into the center ring and pantomimed falling asleep. As the rings around him filled with proud horses and dancing girls, his dream parade streamed in the performers' entrance by the bandstand and circled the track one time counterclockwise: first a lone white horse and then the elephants in pairs, shimmering in silver-embroidered blankets and led by drum majors in "pink uniforms with silver trim and glass buttons."

Among these were Ralph and Curly, flanking a middle pair of elephants so Curly could keep an eye on the front and back of the line; he walked on the audience side and Ralph on the ring side. Gorgeous horse-drawn floats rolled among the elephants, and at the end of the parade came Emmett Kelly himself, grandly enthroned on an elephant-drawn cloud full of sequined and feathered girls as Merle Evans's

The Changing of the Guard on the afternoon of June 11. With the Finale finished at right, elephants and showgirls leave tent through the back door flanking the bandstand. Bandleader Merle Evans stands at front in jacket and cap. Ralph arrived on the lot minutes later.

band played Panto's theme, which was "beautiful music to walk to." When they left the tent at the other side of the bandstand, Ralph always exchanged waves with one of the horn players.

Preparing for spec had taken most of an hour. As soon as the show started at 2:15, the elephants were brought outside the menagerie tent, swept off, and fitted with their blankets and headpieces; then the elephant men changed into their drum-major uniforms in their own tiny dressing tent ("the bull top"), picked up their bull hooks, lined up their charges up in pairs (Pinto and Sparks Show Babe were Ralph's pair), and headed for the performers' entrance at the far end of the big top. During his first spec one of the elephants stepped on the side of his pink shoe. "I tried not to limp and I didn't bitch about it. I learned to watch my feet after that." As soon as spec was finished, the men got out of their costumes and picketed the elephants outdoors until the Grand Finale around 5:00. As the last of twenty-two acts, the Finale was a good deal more complicated than the first spec. It was called the Changing of the Guard, and the show's designers outdid themselves in drafting it.

This time the elephant men streamed into the tent in "red coats with braid" and tall black busby hats like Buckingham Palace guards. Perched on each elephant's head was



a showgirl in a busby hat and a Scotch kilt, and as soon as the girls dismounted, they joined a bevy of their earthbound sisters on the two stages between the rings. Then most of the elephants suddenly peeled out of line and into the three rings to begin a series of tricks on huge steel-framed tubs that Ralph and other red-coated men quickly rolled into place and out again according to cues in the band music: "There was a trick to moving that pig iron, getting the momentum and the balance going." As Curly directed the elephants in the ring farthest from the band and watched for problems in the other two rings, eighty kilted girls did precision military drills on the stages between; and altogether scores of beings--men and "Maids and Mastadons"--were moving roughly in sync to the music in a fluid dance for six, seven, eight minutes.

As the music built to a crescendo, the elephants hustled out of the rings and into a single line on one side of the hippodrome track. Crowned by girls, the three center elephants clambered onto high pedestals; half the rest of the herd turned back to face them, and at the commands "C'mon up! Trunks up!" all the elephants on the ground reared up in two lines facing the center three, placing their forelegs on each other's backs and curling up their trunks like swans' necks. Dozens of elephants in a mirror-image Long Mount: spectacular, untoppable, and the end of the show. Under the roar of applause and the blare of band music, the release: "Alllllll right!" On four feet again, the elephants quickly grabbed trunks to tails ("Tails up!") and hustled ("Move up!") out of the tent and into the sunshine, followed by the bevy of kilted girls; and inside

With “thunder” and “heat lightning” flashing above, the music “wavered” in the wind as the whole jittery herd waited outside the tent for a few minutes behind the bandstand. “The music went back and forth as the wind shifted,” and the sky was “a very dark-blue purple that’s still not night--one of the most dramatic things I’ve ever seen.” Curly and the other bosses debated the risks of performing with jumpy animals, and finally shouted: “Put ‘em back and chain ‘em down!” So, “Move up!” and off to the menagerie

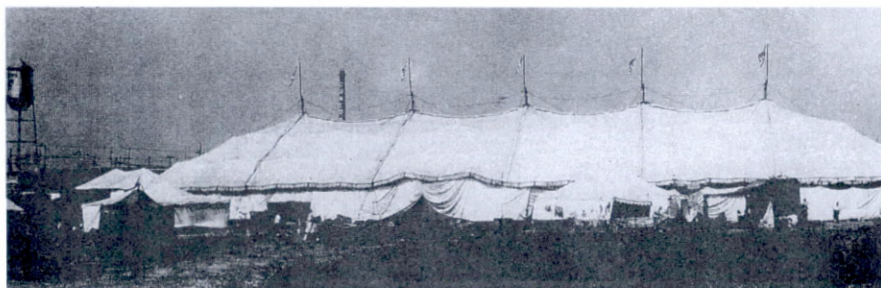
Once this week Ralph was sent off to the "Connecticut" car for "the better part of one day" to assist the porter. All the bull hands took turns helping him. He was white, "an old show guy as gruff as they come, but he kept a clean car." He swept the floors, issued bedding, sold wine and whiskey from his locker, and stopped fights when necessary, for a few men were always in the car during long layovers playing "a card game or shooting craps." The porter didn't have much for Ralph to do, so they talked. "He opened up after a while, telling stories, and I was asking

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DEDUCTIONS		DATE PAID	1934
F. O. A. & TAX	1.0	SOC. SEC. NO.	
VICTORY TAX	80	EMP.	DEPT.
WAR SAV. BONDS		DAYS WORKED	7
LEDGER		SALARY EARNED	16.33
COMMISSARY		TOTAL DEDUCTIONS	7.19
HOLDBACKS		AMOUNT DUE	15.14
AGENTS COMM.			
UNCLAIMED WAGES			
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TOTAL			
DEDUCTIONS	1.19		

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Even before the evening performance, the show began loading onto

Your job is to work the brake. You climb up the front of the wagon on thin iron steps and settle yourself on the seat at the front edge, a slick surface of hard painted wood and bolt heads, way above the elephants even, with nothing to hang onto but a low iron railing around you, and nowhere to rest your feet but the tiny foot-brake pedal in front of you. Clark looks over his shoulder from the left-hand elephant's head as you settle yourself. "All right, Emerson? Hang on. Move up!" The elephants below you lean into their breastbands, the harness chains go taut, and the wagon starts ahead with a jolt that



almost knocks you off. You grip the irons tighter, and keep gripping while you struggle to keep your feet poised on the flat of the brake pedal without actually pushing down on it.

Given the nature of their harness, pulling a wagon with elephants is like towing a toy wagon by a piece of string: it must be steered with care, for once it has gained momentum, there is no way to stop it or back it up; no way to keep it from running into the elephants' hind legs or stop the front wheels from "jackknifing" off to one side. The foot-brake below you is the only corrective, and as the patch of ground ahead suddenly slopes down a bit, Clark yells: "Brake it!" The pedal fights back as you push it ahead; it's at the end of a long rod leading down to a brake-shaft going to the rear wheels, and if they're old-fashioned wooden wheels there's a "screech" of steel on steel as the brake shoe hits the tire. "Ease up on it!" And you do. "Goin' left, Emerson!" The elephants turn and the wagon sways a bit--the sway is noticeable ten feet up--and a minute later, "Lean into that brake, Emerson, we're stoppin' here--hi!" and the elephants stop, the wagon stops. "Good. Get down and unhook 'em." Carefully climb down, unhook the evener from the gooseneck, find another wagon, and do it all over again. That "was called spotting wagons."

After that comes the evening performance: sweep off bulls, headgear and blankets on for spec, pink costumes on, into big top with bulls, once around the track, wave to the horn player, out again. Then costumes off in the bull top, headgear and blankets off, pack blankets in bags by bull top, picket bulls outside. An hour later, bulls' Finale headgear on, red costumes on, into big top, shift props, Long Mount, out again, costumes off, headgear back in bags.

"It's dark and night-time" now,

The menagerie tent in Philadelphia. Around it, from right to left: elephant supply wagon no. 12 with canopy, bull top with clothes drying, hay pile, and two other small menagerie department tops. Small gray tents are donnikers.

past midnight. The crowds are gone and the circus is coming down fast; the lot is hectic and mosquitoey and loud with chugging motors. Under electric lights, the black canvas crews have pulled the big top down, rolled it up in sections, and lifted several of its nineteen tons onto the canvas wagons by hand. The six lowered center poles are now lying on the ground in a long row, and Ralph and Clark arrive with a fresh pair of elephants hitched to the rubber-tired pole wagon. The spare pole is alone on the back; their job is to collect the others. Walking beside the bulls, they carefully guide the wagon over to the first pole and stop alongside it ("Whoap!"). It's solid fir wood, fifty-seven feet long and nearly ten inches thick. The canvasmen stream over and press shoulder to shoulder along its length, waiting for the canvas boss to speak.

"Put your hands on it!"

They hunch. "Lift it up! Walk with it! Over your heads! Lay it in!"

With a "smooth" lift they roll the huge pole onto the four-foot-high wagon bed, where it clanks into place beside the spare. They step back; Clark tells the elephants "Move up!" and soon "Hold it!" and the wagon stops alongside the second pole. The same arms heft this pole into place beside the last, *thud!*, and twenty minutes later all seven poles are piled on and lashed down with the ends hanging off the back. "It was a brutal job" for the canvasmen, and a late one for Ralph and Clark, who could finally turn the wagon over to the tractor crews, ride their elephant team to the train, load them into the

cars, and get into their bunks. The extra pay was fifty cents, off the books.

Some bull hands shoveled manure for months before the bosses even let them water an elephant, but Curly signed Ralph up for teamster's pay the first week and put him in the ring the second day. He fit right in, a "springy" kid who "learned fast." The elephants liked him too. He had no trouble from anyone in the herd, which was unusual. It helped that he knew horses already; many elephant men were good with both. "The Pratts had trusted me with draft horses," and "essentially, elephants are just big horses." They're shrewder, though. "You can talk to an elephant. It's damn hard to talk to a horse."

Sun., June 18. En Route to Waterbury Co[nn]. Today is moving day. We followed the vally of the Del. River thru N.J. & thru the Catskill Mts. We crossed the Hudson Ri. over the Perkipsi bridge 160 ft high. Tonight we hit Waterbury. It was late when we got done. It rained hard at night.

Most of the workers rode the flat-cars on the train where it was cooler. "That's a lovely way to see the country." The Poughkeepsie bridge was notorious: "The story was that a lot of guys got tossed off that bridge--workingmen with grudges." Arriving in Waterbury in late afternoon, the bull hands rode the elephants from the rail yards to the lot, helped set up the tents, put the elephants in the menagerie top, and fed them as the rain started. This was Ralph's eighteenth birthday.

Watching the circus go up was the day's miracle. The whole show arrived on the lot packed in a few trucks and a hundred-odd baggage wagons and rose into a functioning city within a few hours: the side show top a gateway to the street, the menagerie top behind it like a city hall, and the big top rising "cathedral-like" behind them both, a St. Peter's in a canvas "Rome." Thirty-eight smaller tents clustered around those three: cooktent, horse tents, blacksmith's tent, doctor's tent, dressing tents, concession tents, and who knows what else. The room-sized bull top was pitched right outside the

menagerie top so the bull hands could easily get into their costumes there before performances. The men's trunks and suitcases (their "crumb boxes") were delivered from the train and spotted along the inside walls.

Theft was not unheard of, but wealth was usually spread around in other ways. One of the elephant bosses ran a slot machine inside, paying someone else for the privilege of keeping it there, a kind of payoff that went on constantly at all levels. Another man named Chester made payoffs so he could sell haircuts in the bull top, barbering away in a white "dentist's smock." Ralph watched him work but got his own haircuts off the lot at "the cheapest barber shop I could find." Chester expected big tips, and "I could never get used to tipping."

The elephant men's costumes were kept in Elephant Department wardrobe wagons near the bull top. The men picked the costumes up at the wagon door from Benny the wardrobe man and his two assistants in the "busy" minutes before performances, and returned them right afterwards. They handed in their hats first; some men changed out of their costumes immediately while others waited with the elephants; then the rest changed before they took off the elephants' headdresses and blankets, which were folded and stored in canvas bags by the bull top, outside in good weather and inside in wet. Every man's hats, shoes, pants, and coats were numbered (three coats, one pink and two red: long-tailed for good weather and waist-length for rain), and the show liked them neat, sending everything out for dry cleaning on long layovers. Ralph was warned: "You get anything on those pants and it'll be docked outa your pay!" But he was "careful" and it never was.

How did the wardrobe wagons get into place? Elephants put them there. Elephants spotted most of the wagons into place as tractors towed them in from the trains. Quick and sure, the elephants pushed or pulled anything "wherever it needed to go": prop wagons and seat wagons and "working" cats' cages outside the big top, other cages in the menagerie top, Panto's Paradise floats here, genera-

tor wagons there. Every wagon had its place and number. "The numbers on a wagon mean something and you memorize them in short order."



Inside menagerie tent. Tent-fly at right can also be seen in exterior photo; sign on nearest quarter pole says "No Smoking."

Somebody would yell: "Go spot 77!" and Ralph and his partner would ride over on the elephants to do it, the teamster staying on the left-hand elephant when they arrived while Ralph got off the other elephant and climbed up on the wagon to act as brakeman. That was the job Clark had been training him for in Philadelphia, and "quite frankly, I did not like it." It was "sort of a dangerous job" because the perch was so insecure: "on a lumpy lot you could get quite a ride up there," and the brakes "were never any damn good" anyway. But it was still part of the marvelous "organized confusion" of a circus rising, where a thousand interlocking jobs make a single whirl of activity in which "everything is so fluid and yet nothing bumps into each other."

Once the wagons were spotted into place and the big top was raised (by mid-evening in Waterbury), the seats were put in, a huge task that took several hundred men a few hours to finish. They worked in rotations, elephant men included. The big top's oval held two kinds of seats. Running down the long sides were the reserved seats on huge grandstands filled with thousands of folding chairs. On the round ends were the "blues," the cheap bleachers that flanked the public entrance at one end and the performers' entrance at the other. The seating was all wood

and came into the tent stacked on wagons. The frames went up first: the step-cut stringers and the twelve-foot jacks that held them up

in back; then the seat boards for the bleachers and the plank flooring for the grandstands. Setting up the flooring became Ralph's one job that did not involve elephants. The grandstand floor planks were called bible-backs because they were hinged like book covers and stored folded. Closed up, the "bibles" were about eighteen inches wide, fifteen feet long, and "comfortable heavy." Seatmen handed them off the wagons to pairs of men on the ground who opened them out flat onto the waiting grandstand frames. The bull hands, the ring stock men, and the cat men put them up in different parts of the tent--and they raced each other.

"It was so fast." You and your partner get a bible from the wagon, run it over to the bare stringers, clap it down on the first step, open it to its full width, *one!*, and run back for another, "grabbin' 'em fast fast." The next two men open their bible on the second step, *two!*, and you're back with a new one, climbing the last one to set it in place, *three!*, and then they climb up on yours, *four!*, and so on till the topmost bible is in place fifteen rows up. Then you do the next section over and the next, the whole big top resounding with yells and slapping timber for about twenty minutes. "Everyone galloped," and the bull hands usually beat the ring stock men "even though there were more of them." That was it. Somebody else put on the folding chairs and took it all down when the circus was ready to leave. "Just enough work so it doesn't last too long. They kept you busy but you had

time off." The extra pay was a dollar bill from the seat boss, maybe today, maybe tomorrow, but you always got it, and "you could put it in your pocket and go do something else."

Mon., June 19. Waterbury. It was quite a morning. I registried for the draft here, had a shower & swim at the YMCA and called home. Also collected \$2. for extra work. Got a letter from Nan [Grandma], & lost my jack-knife. Rain in Morning, cloudy in afternoon.

Tues., June 20. Waterbury. It was a slow day. I was on watch. I called home, all was O.K. I loaned Wilison a dollar. The Teardown was kind of wet but it got over O.K. Clark let me walk a team [to the train alone] too.

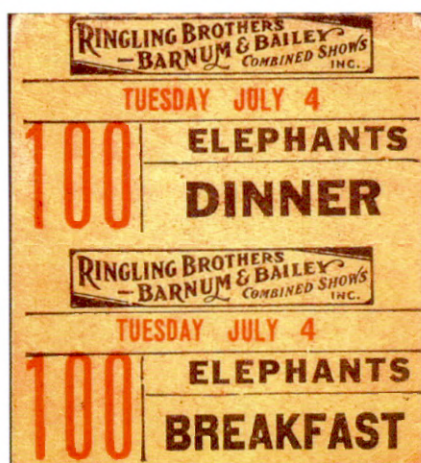
Wed., June 21. New Haven Conn. Well the morning was hard but we got put up OK. I got \$2. for extra work & bought 3 bananas & ice cream. I got 3 letters & called home.

Thurs., June 22. New Haven. It was a fair day. I was off for a while & loaded up on sweets. We tore [down] & were late. The pole job was slow, I never thought we would get thru. We have a long trip.

Fri., June 23. Bridgeport Ct. It was about [a] 1:10 trip for us to go from NH to here. We got set up o.k. I collected \$2 for extra work & got my first pay \$15.14. I bought a qt. of Ice cream & 2 pies.

"Those would be Frisbie pies, for a nickel each," little boxed fruit pies four inches across. They cost a dollar now. Most sums have increased twentyfold like that: the two dollars' extra pay would be about \$40 today, and the week's wages about \$300. Ralph bought food when he went off the lot. He didn't drink or smoke, but everybody else seemed to. The circus word for liquor was "snootboot," and "liquor more or less kept that thing going. They weren't drunk every day, but they had enough to drink every day, and they had good food." The main thing was "they didn't want you showing up drunk."

But tobacco was all right. Older men chewed it and younger ones smoked it, rolling their own because it was cheaper. The chewers favored Beech-Nut tobacco and the cigarette-rollers liked Bull Durham. There were "butt cans all over the place,"



Providence cookhouse ticket.

and the sleeping car was a haze of "blue smoke" at night before they put the lights out. With its stimulants taken care of, the circus entertained itself. The bull hands told elephant tales all day; they ignored newspapers and "almost never" spoke of the war. "About the only thing you might see is somebody reading *Billboard*."

The elephant men were characters. They tended to be tall and thin, "wiry and fast on their feet even if they were old." Except for one Hawaiian, all were white, and most went by nicknames. The department boss Curly Schafer was "a military man" and "ran a tight ship." (He used to train army dogs.) Four assistant bosses helped him run things on the show. Among the thirty-odd workers, a "streetwise" Boston kid called Nine Blankets was known for being chilly; he got his name when nine men woke up cold in the sleeping car one night and found him snoozing under a pile of their blankets. Piccolo Pete was a "carnival man" getting elephant experience he hoped to use in one of the larger carnivals. "You never know," he'd say, "when they're gonna get an elephant and need a helper." Pete was "on the fat side" for a bull hand, "a nice guy, kept his hair slicked down, carried a comb." Elmer Santana was a blue-eyed redhead from Waterbury who wanted to be an acrobat.

Another redhead was Possum Red, "one of the elephant bosses under Curly Schafer." Big and gravel-voiced, Possum Red carried himself with a "swagger" and "usually wore a white cap." He greatly admired

Ralph's Stetson, "a suntan Open Road" that "made quite a splash" on the show. Red mooched it as often as he could to wear in town. "Can I borrow your hat, Ralph?" "Sure." But he'd always change the creases, giving it a peak with four dents like a Mountie's hat, and then forget to change it back.

Because of the war, the whole show was "shorter than heck of help." Transients joined and left all the time. The food was good, but the work was hard, and "a lot of 'em quit." In the Elephant Department, Clark, Santana, and Nine Blankets were all under thirty; but Curly, Piccolo Pete, and Possum Red were closer to forty, and many good workers were well past that, including the bosses Shipley and Duffy. Older still were four ancient night watchmen who "swapped yarns" and tried to stay awake in the menagerie tent and out on the picket line. "The circus took care of its own." Indeed, the plum job in the Elephant Department was held by Old Buck, a retired baggage stock teamster who did nothing but take care of the department mascot Harold, a fine Appaloosa horse that Ida Ringling North had given the former elephant boss Walter McClain. Sometimes Curly rode Harold from the train to the lot, but mostly he stayed in his shaded paddock by the bull top while Buck dozed in a canvas chair nearby. It was Ralph's ambition to ride Harold someday.

The Elephant Department's domain consisted of the elephants' side of the menagerie tent and the area right outside. Bulls and bull hands went in and out through tent-flies in the menagerie-top sidewall. Outside were the bull top and wardrobe wagons, the hay wagon, and the hay-strewn picket line with its rows of stakes. In good weather, the elephants spent most of the day and night picketed outside. Nearby were the water troughs, the harness racks, and the bull hands' latrine or "donniker," a tiny tent around an open ditch. This was the "rankest"-smelling thing around, and always went as close to the edge of the lot as possible.

Washing up on the lot ("boiling out") took some ingenuity. There

were no sinks or showers; all the water came from four water trucks that the show filled from fire hydrants. Performers and showgirls at the far end of the lot each got two buckets a day for sponge baths, one to wash and one to rinse. Ralph brushed his teeth and shaved from a bucket outside the bull top. He'd get his shaving kit from his suitcase, "find something to sit on," lather with bar soap and shaving brush, and shave using a hand mirror and his brass-and-copper safety razor. Curious townspeople often gathered in a half-circle to gawk; he was "amused" and answered their questions. "Blade sharp enough?" they'd ask. "Don't you miss hot water?"

Inside the menagerie tent, there was hay everywhere: thick beds of hay under the elephants, a lush carpet of hay under the camels, zebras, and giraffes; piles of hay bales stacked in the center before feeding time, hay on the elephants' backs, hay on the men's clothes. It was all bought locally, so its scent and color varied slightly from town to town, and the "nice smell to the bales of new hay" greeted you as you entered the tent. Each elephant ate a hundred pounds or more every day, parceled out morning, noon, and night; and when the tent was not full of crowds, the sounds inside were of animals' chewing and occasional snuffling, and of hay being lightly crunched and stirred underfoot. The elephants' ankle chains jingled like handfuls of coins as they swayed, and sometimes they purred low rumbling purrs.

The elephants were chained whenever they were not on the move. In the menagerie tent and on picket lines outside, their left front and right rear legs were chained to iron stakes that the bull hands drove in themselves. (On sandy lots, steel-necked wooden stakes were driven in beside the iron ones to keep them in place.) In the train cars, the same two legs were fastened to rings. The chain around the rear leg was fastened with a simple snap, and the front leg by a snap or clevis. A clevis (rhymes with crevice) was an iron U



Ralph on Harold shortly before the performance in Hartford on July 6, taken looking east behind the big top. Stringer wagon no. 31 and generator wagon no. 112 are backed up near sidewall at left. Watchman sits inside a second generator wagon; a cluster of lights stands behind. Note Ringling stencils.

with a bolt running between the tips. These were used on the escape artists, the "locksmiths." These elephants could easily undo snaps with their trunks, and they could undo clevises too if they fiddled with them and banged them against their stakes enough. A man could find and undo a snap in a few seconds; clevises took about thirty seconds. Some men carried pliers to screw the bolts in and out; Ralph used his fingers. Chaining and unchaining the elephants was done a dozen times throughout the day: before and after watering, performing, working, or going to and from the train.

The worst place to chain or unchain was in the train itself, especially at night. The elephants traveled in three oversized stock cars about seventy feet long, each designed to carry a dozen elephants, three pair at one end and three pair at the other, all loaded to face the

center door. The back pairs were generally chained and loaded first and unloaded last. "Checking the chains used to be kind of a scary thing." No one thought to use flashlights, and even during the day there was "not much light" from the wall slits. At night, some rail yards kept lights shining, but others "didn't seem to have anything," and you had to feel your way among the elephants in the dark. "It's lucky they stand with their legs pretty much close to one another and don't straddle out. You'd stoop down low and crawl in between the elephants and just tap 'em to let 'em know that you were coming through, mumbling elephant talk: 'Get over, get over; all right, stay still, it's only me.' Of course, the train isn't

going anywhere, but if the elephants started rocking or something you wouldn't want to be caught there, especially if one of them was holding out for getting even with someone. I didn't have that experience, thank the Lord."

When all dozen elephants were loaded in a car, there was a gap of five or six feet between the facing heads of the four center elephants, just enough room for a couple of men "to sit comfortably" and look out the open door as the train was going. The elephants "liked to look out" too, but only the center four "could really see, and the rest are saying, 'Life's not fair!'" The elephants braced their legs when they felt the train about to stop, as it apparently did several times during the seventeen-mile trip from New Haven to Bridgeport, for the 1:10 run was about three times as long as it should have been. They were probably "waiting for troop trains or something. We were not a high priority." Even ordinary passenger trains went ahead of the circus. "You'd see the troop trains; all the windows were blacked out."

Sat., June 24. Bridgeport. Did the usual thing in the morning & went for a swim in the ocean in the afternoon. Got paid for the pole wagon job & Wilson paid up.

The oceanside lot near P. T. Barnum's cemetery at Seaside Park was a chance for a bath: "Water very, very cold!" The next day's layover in Worcester became a family reunion, because most of Ralph's father's relatives lived there.

Sun., June 25. Worcester Ma[ss]. Landed here in the morning. Saw Nan [Grandma] when we put the Bull tent up. Bulls have quite a time coming to the lot. Saw Nan & Gramp. Slept there & had a bath too.

Mon., June 26. Worcer. Quite a day. Arrived on lot in afternoon. My folk[s] & brother [George] came & saw me, then my aunt [Midge]. Had supper with them & slep at my aunts. It was sure nice.

Tues., June 27. Worcester. I rode the elephant horse & did O.K. I pulled U.[ncle] Walt out of the mud with a bull. Saw Gus, Paul, Mom, Dad, Geo., Nan, Gramp, Nan, Midge & Bob & got a pair of Rubbers.

"It was a bright day but there were some rain puddles around." The whole family came in for the afternoon and visited Ralph before the show. Somehow he got Old Buck's permission to ride Harold--"no one rode that horse"--and put on his spec costume and rode back and forth for everybody behind the tent. He wanted a picture of this; nobody took one, but his younger cousin Paul thought he looked "pretty great" up there. During the afternoon performance, Paul enjoyed "all of the fanfare," the aerialists "high up in the tent," and the Long Mount in the Finale: "all these elephants going up together--that was very impressive!" Paul was "excited" that Ralph was in the show; their grandfather was "laughing" and "proud of all us kids," his own father Gus was "full of fun" (he loved the circus and came every year), and Walter was off visiting his old usher cronies. When they left for supper (their grandmother "always put on a spread"), Walter announced that his car was stuck, giving Ralph a chance to get "an old elephant called Queenie" and pull him out. Walter enjoyed pleasing his nephew; he'd bought Ralph his first horse and remembered him as "a nice kid" who was "always smiling."

Paul found the car pull "quite eventful" and watched carefully, not-



Spotting wagons in Portland on June 30. Teamster is Possum Red in his white cap; brakeman is almost certainly Ralph. Canvas cover makes it even harder to stay on seat. Breastplate's N identifies closer elephant as Nellie; note harness going to singletree behind her. Maurice Allaire photo.

ing how the elephant's harness chains "hook into [the ends of] a singletree" bar, with another chain "running out" from that "to hook onto the bumper or the axle." (Paul had pulled cars out of the mud himself with his father's Ringling grays. A year or two before, "a guy and his sweetheart" got stuck in springtime mud on Malden Hill in West Boylston and came down to the house to ask for help. Paul said, "I'll do it for five dollars," and "pulled 'em out with the circus horses! I thought it was funny.") And so they left Ralph to do the evening show.

At least they had seen the whole performance. Ralph never had, which is a common enough complaint

Ralph Sr. and younger son George.



among circus people. He saw the spec and the Finale because he was in them, but he was seldom able to catch any other acts. "Every time I could sneak a chance I tried to get a look at the show," but chances were pretty rare. "I could catch glimpses" from the performers' entrance when "we were standing with the elephants" waiting to go in, but that was about it, because the bull hands

were supposed to stay close to the picket line during the rest of the show. Nor was there much chance to meet performers. Socializing with the showgirls "was a heavy no-no," and the two hundred other performers blended in so well in their street clothes that "you're never quite sure who's who."

The one act that Ralph made a point of seeing was Albert Ostermaier's "Wingless Pegasus." Enlisting a buddy to watch his elephant ("Hey, Joe, let me take a quick peek at that!") he found a "shadowy" place under the blues and watched the single spotlighted Palomino circle the tent on its hind legs--gleaming, "full of fire," and "just about as vertical as you could get--and that whole damn track! That's a thousand feet!" Whip raised in guidance, his young trainer walked alongside in a swallow-tailed coat, gallantly facing the audience. Ralph watched closely, "trying to get down his whip movements." Every three or four seat sections, "he'd let the horse come down, and then up again," keeping him at a good "strong walk. He did a hell of a job. His father broke the horse," and he took the act over, "and there was always a little bit of envy in my mind about that."

After the evening show on one of these New England dates, Ralph and Nine Blankets went out to look at the busy midway. The butchers were "sloughing the joint," closing up shop (rhymes with plowing), but the nighttime crowds were still thick and the generator-powered midway lights were still blazing cheerfully against the dark. Picking up some empty Sno-Cone papers from the ground,

the two kids got leftover slush from some Sno-Cone men and sat down to enjoy it on the grass beneath a midway wagon, "using the tire as a back-rest and watching things." The numbers on Ralph's luminous wristwatch were all charged up from the midway lights, and "that thing shone like" crazy for a few minutes. They "watched it fade" under the dark wagon, then aimed it back at the lights and watched "how long it would stay bright" as they finished their Sno-Cones. When the midway emptied Ralph went off to get the elephants for the pole wagon. "Clark had me doing it" alone now, and it was still amazing to see the canvasmen lift the center poles: "I marveled every time."

Wed., June 28. Fitchburg Mass.
First of the one day stands. Red had me pulling quarter poles with Big Babe. I took our team to the cars alone. I got a dollar for bibles & 50¢ for pole wagon. Had dinner with Dad. Saw Geo. Michell in AM.

One-day stands more or less began and ended in the dark. The train might roll in at five in the morning, and the elephants, tired from balancing in the swaying cars, would step gingerly down the ramps and walk off to the lot neck-chained in pairs, most of them holding trunks to tails. The sleepy men rode along on top, bull hooks laid across their laps, and Curly ambled alongside on Harold. The Fitchburg lot was high in the hills above the rail yards, past steep streets of dawn-lit three-family houses. When the elephants arrived, the lot was full of wagons and workmen, but the circus was still tentless except for the smoking cookhouse. Hay and stakes were waiting for the elephants; the neck chains came off, leg chains went on, and they began eating on their usual picket line as they waited for the menagerie tent to be raised. Groups of local kids wandered around, mostly unsupervised but knowing enough to keep out of the way, ogling the animals and the commotion, secretly staggered by the size of the temporary city about to go up in their big field. The dawn sunshine brightened into "a nice day," and the cookhouse flag went up around seven. "There used to be a gang of us that if we were free we'd



Kitty and George by giraffe pen, taken looking southwest toward Barbour Street in Hartford.

be up front, waiting in line talking."

As more equipment arrived, the other tents began to go up: the horse tents, the menagerie, sideshow, and shop tents, and of course the big top itself, its huge stake line pounded in by black sledge gangs, the center poles raised by elephants with block and tackle, the roof canvas unrolled and laced up on the ground by the canvasmen and pulled aloft by more elephants. "Elephants did a lot of work," and Ralph no more than glimpsed most of it. Each bull hand had his own elephant jobs during set-up and teardown. Some helped

Ralph sweeping elephants for Panto's Paradise as performance begins. This is the menagerie picket line; note wooden stakes for sandy lot.



unload wagons from the trains, some helped raise poles and canvas, and some spotted wagons as Ralph had learned to do in Philadelphia. This morning in Fitchburg he learned a second job, positioning big-top quarter poles. His teacher was Possum Red, the elephant boss who sometimes borrowed his hat.

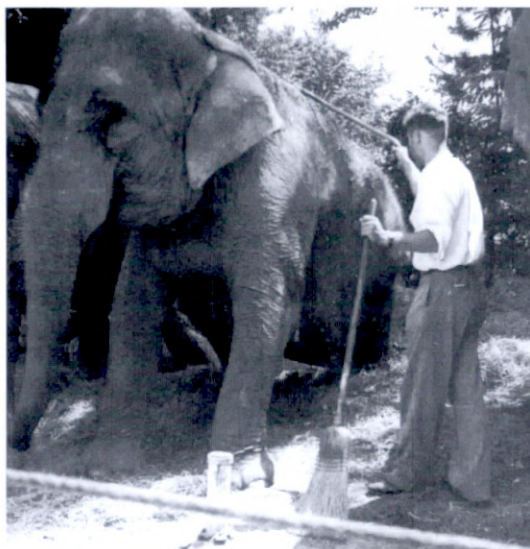
The first step for any elephant work was harnessing. Ringling stored its work harnesses on wire rope stretched over a row of X-shaped stands. Each harness was sized for a particular elephant and had her name painted on the breast-band. Big Babe was a favorite of Red's, and her harness was as big as any, a monstrously heavy thing made of conveyor-belt canvas with steel fittings, its shoulder loop alone standing four feet high. It took two men to put it on. Since Red was a boss, he didn't have to help, but he did anyway. "Red liked working with elephants, so if he felt like it he'd do it all night long." He and Ralph lifted Babe's harness off the rack, said "Head down!", slid the loop over her ears, and let her shimmy it into place as she straightened up. Burnished brown from "honest work," the harness chains drooped from the harness corners at her sides; Ralph drew them out behind her and hooked them to the ends of a four-foot-long wooden singletree bar. "All right, move up!" he said, and the elephant and the two men strolled off to the big top, the singletree bumping along behind them on the grass. Both men were carrying bull hooks, but they weren't using them.

Elephant men carried bull hooks everywhere as a sort of badge of office. They looked like ordinary J-shaped wooden canes except for the small faucet-shaped hook fitted into the tip. Customers in the menagerie tent always asked, "What are those for?" Bull hooks helped control the elephants, not as a weapon but as a guide. Like well-trained animals of

any kind, circus elephants worked mostly by voice commands, and "they listened to you." *Come on, go ahead, pick it up, move up, move out* for "go," *hi* or *whoa* or *hold it* for "stop," *all right* for "trick's over," *head down, tail up, easy, get over*--whatever it was, the elephant got the gist of it from the nature of the situation and its demands, and the hook was seldom necessary. At moments, it could reinforce or replace the voice like a hand on a human shoulder: a gentle push or tug at the foreleg for "this way," a tap on the foot or forehead for "move this," a whack on the butt for "hurry up." Like children, elephants think with their skins. So you'd pat them too, friendly slaps on the hip, trunk, or shoulder, firm so it wouldn't tickle: "Good girl, good girl." And sometimes they'd pat back, moving the tips of their trunks around your head or body in the same way that friendly dogs and horses do with their muzzles, and like those animals they appreciated gentle scratching. When you swept them off they'd sigh.

In general, elephants and men cooperated. Elephants are huge animals, hurricanes if panicked or angry, grudge-holders with skins an inch thick. Bullying them doesn't work. They cooperated with humans by training and temperament, and mostly shrugged off human foibles. "They're smart enough to know that we're dumb enough to do dumb things." The older elephants were pros, hams in the ring, and then "they'd pull their hearts out" spotting wagons wheel-deep in mud. They inspired as much loyalty as they displayed. "Elephant simple," the men called themselves--stuck on elephants. Men who didn't like them didn't get on the department, and men who mistreated them didn't stay.

It wasn't Eden. There were occasional scuffles, for neither men nor elephants got along perfectly among themselves; nor did every elephant get along with every man, and bull hands accordingly became "realists" about battles of will, knowing that in extremity their bull hooks and their wits were all they had to save themselves. Otherwise, though, the rules were strict: no hooking on the ears or anywhere ahead of the neck,

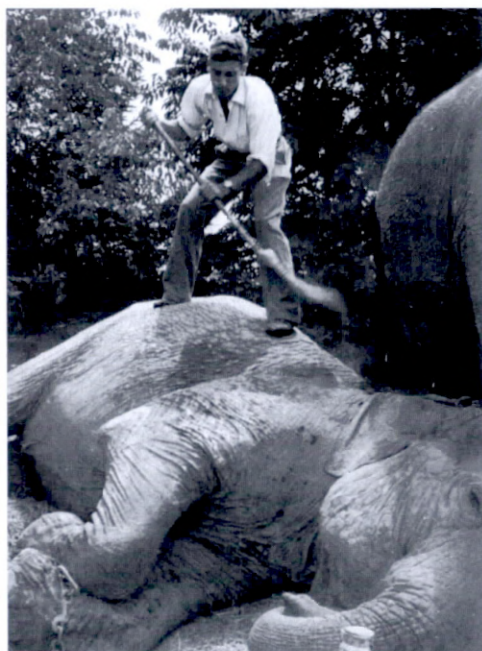


Coming down on left side.

and easy does it elsewhere. The real secret about bull hooks was that they were good to lean on during the course of a long day. You could sit back against them too, resting on the curved handle, and if you braced your legs right, you could even catnap in that position, and men often did.

Bull hooks were a legacy from the Indian mahouts, but most other details of elephant work followed American customs for working horses and cattle. Like horsemen, bull

Sweeping back and right side; note ankle snap.



hands routinely walked at an elephant's *left* shoulder, mounted from the left, called a pair of harness elephants a "team," and generally rode a team's left-hand elephant like a coach postilion. The harness eveners and single-trees resembled those on a horse-drawn coach, and working teams were kept abreast by an improvised ox yoke made of two collar chains hooked together. Each elephant had her own collar chain stored by her harness; it latched under the throat and had its upper half cushioned by a tube of heavy canvas

fire hose with her name painted on it. For pulling quarter poles, one elephant was enough, so Babe wore no collar chain as Ralph and Red stood with her by the big top awaiting the call "Elephants!"

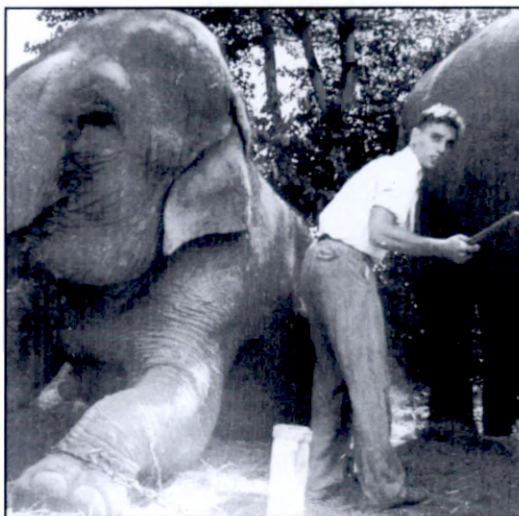
A forest of poles held the huge tent aloft. Once the center poles and roof canvas were raised and the edges propped up by side poles, the tent was still only half ready, for each side of the long roof drooped sadly over the hundred-foot gaps from the center poles to the sidewalls. The sag was corrected by two concentric ovals of secondary poles called "quarter poles." Canvasmen put them up, slotting them into roof grommets marked by stars sewn into the canvas. The inner oval of quarter poles looped around the circus rings and the outer one followed the line of seat-fronts twenty feet beyond, freeing a path in between for the hippodrome track. At the call for elephants, there were no seats or rings in sight, just dozens of quarter poles freshly slotted into the roof grommets in two rough ovals, all tied into place at crazy angles. Four elephants then straightened them out. They began at one end of the tent and pulled the poles into place down its length, aligning the rows and tightening the roof canvas. Two elephants worked each long side of the tent, one on the inner row and one on the outer. When they were done, the roof would be perfectly taut and all the poles would slope outwards at a consistent angle of about fifteen degrees, eyeballed by the elephant

men as they worked. It was a tricky job, and Red was "razzin' me" beforehand: "Think you can do this?" But he gave Ralph a "good elephant" for it: Babe "trusted you and knew what she was doing."

As their work begins, the four elephants are waiting inside one end of the tent under the sagging roof, all harnessed and facing outwards toward the half-raised sidewall. Each elephant has two men standing with her, or three in Babe's case. Ralph waits at her left shoulder, facing backwards and watching a black canvasman hook a chain from Babe's singletree to a rope loop at the base of an outer-row quarter pole. Red is standing aside, "watching me." The quarter pole is slanting out wickedly over their heads, telephone-pole thick and painted bright red. Babe is swishing her tail and pulling up some grass; the inner-row elephant behind them is waiting patiently in the shadows. The canvas boss says, "Go ahead on quarters!" and Red nods at Ralph.

"Move up!" Babe plods ahead a few feet and the pole-end scrapes across the grass. As it moves forward, the roof thirty feet overhead suddenly loses its sag and grows taut. When the pole reaches its proper angle a moment later, Red shouts, "Hold it!" Ralph yells "Hi!" and Babe stops. "Now back her up a little!" "Get back," says Ralph, touching her foreleg, and she shuffles back a step. The chain slackens enough for the canvasman to unhook it. "Now get her over to the next red one!" Ralph turns forward, saying, "C'mon, Babe," and they walk twenty feet over to the next pole and get back in position: Babe facing out, Ralph facing in. The canvasman hooks on and says, "All right." Red nods, and Ralph says, "Move up!" *Scrrrrape!* "Hold it!" "Hi!" "Back her up," says Red. "Back, girl!" She backs, the canvasman casts off, and Babe's trunk wanders around looking for more grass. "Well, come on, Emerson! Get her over to the next one—you ain't done yet!"

The elephant on the inner row is already several poles ahead, and although the roof is still drooping at the far end of the tent, the canvas at this end has already assumed its proper shape, and the poles newly



Sweep left side.

pulled into place are no longer askew but show the start of two crisp parallel rows. It's grown brighter inside as the canvas has stretched. Ralph is managing Babe and watching Red at the same time. "I'm kinda confused but I just go where he points." By the time they reach the far end, he's caught the rhythm: they're talking less and almost running from pole to pole. "It all went very quickly," and apparently he did all right. What did Red say afterwards? "Probably talked about the weather." Competence got no praise, but "do something wrong and you get ignition started!"

That was pulling quarter poles, part of the tent's set-up. When the tent came down, you *pushed* quarter poles, knocking them loose so they could be slipped out of their grommets and carted away. Elephants did the pushing too, running down the rows of poles quickly butting them with their heads. That wasn't Ralph's job; he'd already done his share of quarter-pole work. As Babe and the other elephants left the tent, big-top crews were already at work jacking the earlier poles into letter-perfect alignment by hand—just for looks, "frosting on top of the cake"—and the seatmen were beginning to set up the seat-frames.

Outside the menagerie top, Ralph and Red quickly unharnessed Babe, saying "Head down!," sliding off the heavy harness, and carrying it to the harness rack. Ralph gave Babe a long drink at the canvas water trough, the

custom after harness work, and took her to her place on the picket line, where she started eating hay as he looped the leg chains around her ankles and fastened them. Red then invoked boss's privilege and took off while Ralph and the other bull hands headed back to the big top to put up the bibles. An hour or so later, with all the folding chairs in place, the tent's patriotic color scheme became evident: white canvas roof with a blue panel along the peak, red grandstand chairs and red

quarter poles along the outside walls, blue quarter poles around the rings, blue bleachers at the ends, and red and blue stars sewn into the white ceiling where the quarter poles went in. The ceiling's white was less "sparkling" now than in Philadelphia, for Ralph had sadly watched it getting stained by grass and mud and freckled with canvasmen's footprints as the show began its travels. But he still relished the tent's vastness inside and walked its length "whenever I got the chance, usually on my way somewhere else."

Sometime this morning, his father stopped by for a quick visit. His job as the New England rep for the leather goods of the Texas Tanning & Manufacturing Co. allowed him to choose his own schedule, and he chose circus towns whenever he could. Today he brought along his friend George Mitchell, a "high-end" shoe company rep with a Midwesterner's fondness for good horses. Dapper in their suits, the two men looked over the ring stock and said hi to Ralph and Curly by the menagerie tent, cheerfully talking shop as they looked at the elephants. Ralph Sr. invited his son to dinner, and they ate in town between shows, saying goodbye until the circus came to Hartford a week later. At the midnight teardown, Ralph led the pole-wagon team and rode off to the rail yards as usual on the left-hand elephant's head. Yet it was a memorable trip, for the bulls' hair was singed off each spring before circus season, and as he swayed through the dark on "the horribly long ride" down the

Fitchburg hills, he was wearing the "cheapest" cotton pants "in the world," and that hair was getting pretty stubbly: "Talk about sitting on wire!"

Thurs., June 29. Manchester N.H. Another real day. I pulled quarter poles again today. I had 2 pints of ice cream. Got a dollar for bibles & 50¢ for pole wagon. Had lunch in a diner at night with the boys.

Fri., June 30. Portland Maine. Usual work moving. Spec was late. I got paid & a dollar for bibles, bought badly need[ed] shoe laces & had pint of ice cream. I stood Side shows [menagerie] watch for 50¢ & went to eat uptown after the show.

June "Memoranda." It has been quite a month. I seemed to have changed my whole way of living & thinking. Leaving High School and getting rid of my horse I thought would be something hard to get over but strange to say I did it easily. After leaving home for the circus I didn't seem to mind at all. I hardly thought of home or the people & things I left behind. It seemed after the first day on the show, as though I had been with it almost all my life. That seems strange every time I think about it. I've eaten food I would never touch & took things for granted which I would [not] stand before. The people here live in a world all their own, the outside or the future does not interest them in the least & I am afraid I too am taking that attitude.

Sat., July 1. Portland. Went swimming in the ocean in the morning. Got a letter from Shirl. Went to town & had my hat cleaned. Met a girl I saw at the show last night. Got paid 50¢ on the pole wagon again.

He met the Portland girl the night before "when I was on watch in the menagerie tent, and we got to talking." The letter was from Shirley Pfau, a pretty neighbor at home who'd galloped all over town with him on her bay horse Dusty. She found Ralph "fun" and liked circuses too, so when he sent a glowing letter and a route card, she wrote back: "By the looks of this schedule you are going to be a hard person to keep in



Emmett Kelly with his water bucket. The south grandstands burn in the background.

touch with. . . . It won't be long before you are in Hartford. Are you going to mail me a couple passes?--That riding idea [for me] to ride [circus horses] for \$35 a week sounds super. How's chances of trying it the couple of days you are in Hartford? That will give me the general idea of what kind of life it is. Don't forget to answer that question. I am serious.--So you clean elephants, huh? Another thing I can't see is you getting up at 6:00. How do they get you out of bed, with a derick?--By the sounds of your letter, the circus life is pretty good."

Sun., July 2. Enroute to Providence R.I. Slept all the way to Worcester, rode flats to RI. I pulled quarter poles & rigging in the big top,

Stringer wagon no. 31 is pulled away from sidewall.



after carried bibles, made \$2 today. After work I went to a Chinese Restaurant & had a meal. Went to bed early.

When the trains unloaded at the Providence rail yards with crowds of townspeople gathered nearby to watch, a few dozen ring stock horses suddenly broke away and started running down the tracks "as a herd" and the locals began "cheering 'em on like a ballgame, hollering 'Giddup! Giddup!'" The horses had a "high-spirited run" and the ring stock men didn't get them all

rounded up till evening. Busy with their own animals, the bull hands watched the horses disappear and rode off to the lot as usual. The next day the elephants acted up. Was it full-moon fits? The full moon was only three days away.

Mon., July 3. Providence. Quite a busy day for the show. The bulls had a fight. [A bull hand named] Riley had a fight, & was fired. I went for a walk with a [ring stock] groom thru park & Zoo here.

Tues., July 4. Providence. A real fourth. The circus was packed in both performances though we got rained on & missed spec in the afternoon. The cookhouse was something, no [canvas] divider [between performers and workers today] but flags, tablecloths, ice cream & all the trimming[s].

Wed., July 5. Hartford Conn. We arrived on the lot late. Brud Pratt was there. Then came my folks. Curly gave me the morning & afternoon off.

I took a bath at home. That was sure nice. Only 1 performance at night. I told them we were to have bad luck, blood on moon.

Growing up just a few miles away, Ralph had seen Ringling Bros. in Hartford almost every year of his life, first at Colt Park and then at the newer lot on Barbour Street (which sounds like barber). It

was the horses he remembered most: until six years ago, the show had used horses to pull its equipment from the train, and every year curious crowds "white and black" had lined up to watch the red wagons and "the teams of horses that went by, the clop-clop-clop" of hundreds of baggage horses trotting up Barbour Street and turning east onto the grassy lot, hitched four, six, or eight to a wagon. It was all "trucks and tractors" now, but the rest of the Hartford scene was familiar as he and Clark walked their collar-chained team in from the train: he knew the Windsor Street railroad bridge when they rode the elephants under it, knew the Cleveland Avenue houses and the yellow-brick grocery at the corner of Barbour Street, and when the herd turned south and arrived at the sunny lot half a block down, his friend Brud and soon his parents were there to welcome him. The circus trains had come so late that the afternoon show was canceled, so his parents greeted Curly and took Ralph home for a visit, bringing him back in time for the evening show and promising to take him to see his own horse Ranger the next morning.

Ralph had never paid to see a circus. His father always got them in free by knowing someone on the show (sometimes his own brothers), and in recent years Ralph had learned to do the same, to "ask for someone in a department" and "talk my way in." Now he was on the show himself, out in the sultry evening air proudly outfitting the elephants for spec, when he saw the full moon slowly rising over the far end of the big top, colored an unusually dark orange.³ The sight reminded him of a Western serial called "Blood on the Moon" that had run in the *Saturday Evening Post* three years before. A red moon in the story signaled danger on the way, and he mentioned this to the other men, saying we'd better watch out.

Thurs., July 6. Hartford. *Quite a Morning. Folks took me to see Ranger who seemed fair. We took pictures of me on Harold & Elephants. Fire destroyed Tent & I saw a lot of things I never want to see again.*

This was the day of the great cir-



The V of flame climbs upwards. Sketch by Ralph Jr.

cus fire. It started off all right. Ralph's parents and three-year-old brother George picked him up early, took him to the dentist in Hartford, and then drove out to the West Hartford hills to visit Ranger at the Horse Guard stables on Ferncliff Drive. Standing at the fences, the family admired the "beautiful view" of Hartford miles away in the river valley and the horses grazing in the sunshine. Ralph went out in the pasture to get Ranger, whose dark coat was unaccountably dusty. He was supposed to be an officer's horse now, but he obviously hadn't been brushed for several days, and Ralph went to ask the stableman why. "Tony gave me the full scoop as to what was happening with Ranger—nobody was getting along with him and the commandant was afraid of him!"

While his son was off visiting, Ralph Sr. took some snapshots with his new twin-lens reflex. A neck strap held the big camera at waist level while he focused through a ground-glass screen on top. There was his wife Kitty in open-toed shoes and a patterned skirt, smiling and squinting in the sun as she held George by the fence. Click! And there

The ad in the July 15 *Billboard*.

PROFESSIONAL PICTURES CIRCUS FIRE DISASTER

Set of ten enlarged, \$5. Mail check or money order to

RALPH EMERSON
South Glastonbury, Conn.

they were again by the big two-toned Buick, the horizon a soft blue behind them. Click! It was a day for photos. Ralph Sr. wanted pictures of his son leading the elephants in the afternoon show, and young Ralph wanted a picture of himself riding the elephant horse Harold, as he'd done in Worcester when no one had a camera. They'd make up for that today. The twin-lens reflex was freshly loaded and Ralph's best saddle was packed in the trunk, a big Texas Tanning show saddle with a matching bridle.

They arrived at Barbour Street in time to take the Harold picture and let Ralph get ready for the performance. Bumping over the curb, his father parked the Buick on the grass behind the sideshow top and the whole family strolled off to Harold's paddock by the menagerie, Ralph carrying his saddle and tack. Since the Hartford lot was too cramped to set up the menagerie tent, the animals were on view within an unroofed V of canvas between the sideshow and the big top. With its point facing the midway ticket wagons and the main entrance, the V broadened out in front of you as you came in: rows of cage wagons along the sides to the left and right, giraffes and camels and donkeys penned ahead in the middle, and the elephants down at the far end, facing you from their hay-strewn picket line under the trees along the lot's southern edge. Hidden by canvas, Barbour Street was a short walk to the right, and rising above the left-hand cage wagons was the great round end of the big top itself. A warm westerly breeze was blowing in from the leafy street, and the upper edges of the big-top sidewall looked scalloped where they'd been dropped a few feet between poles to let the air in. Midway noises drifted into the menagerie past the ticket wagons, and a light murmur of "anticipation" came out of the big top from the crowd filling up inside, a weekday-afternoon crowd of young children and mothers in summer dresses.

Many families were still out looking at the menagerie animals, so the Emersons stayed behind the scenes as

Ralph got ready for his picture. Harold didn't need much brushing. "Buck kept that horse shining," and the old teamster watched good-naturedly as he saddled up. On went the martingale and bridle, the orange-and-cream blanket, and the fancy saddle, a hand-stamped Two-Tone with a Bob Crosby tree, style No. 909 in the Texas Tanning catalogue. Then off to the wardrobe wagon to get the drum-major costume from Benny, the pink-and-silver one from Panto's Paradise. When he came back outside in costume, a circle of bull hands stood marveling as Ralph got on "the Superintendent's horse" with Buck's blessing.

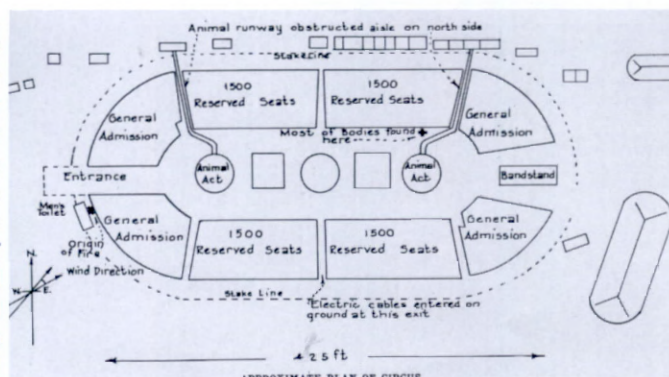
The "area in the backyard" was "a little crowded as usual"--too crowded for the pictures, so they moved down the long southern edge of the big top where there were fewer people. Since the huge tent was set up perpendicular to the street and alongside a field full of wartime victory gardens, its high southern sidewall made a long "alleyway" between itself and the victory-garden fence, a wide corridor jammed with guy-ropes and small tents and wagons. The tan city spire of the Travelers Tower poked into the blue beyond the gardens, and bright American flags rippled from the peaks of the main dressing tent at the alley's far end. Father and son stopped at a



The circus lot after the fire. Looking east. Barbour Street is at the bottom by the undamaged side show top. Left of the sideshow top is the midway, and above it is the curving V of menagerie cage wagons, each now covered in canvas and no longer sidewalled. The little U inside is the giraffe pen. The elephants' old picket line in the menagerie was along the trees to the right of the wagons; the swath of hay on the ground is still faintly visible. (The elephants are now in Sponzo's meadow at the upper left, a little beyond the picture frame but just below the two long horse tents.) The performers' dressing tent is at upper right. The "alleyway" south of the big top is bounded by the victory-garden plots at middle right; the white patch at the alley's lower end is melted glass from a concession tent's Coca-Cola bottles. The men's public latrine, no longer visible, was just left of the upper four menagerie wagons, immediately to the right of the public entrance at the bottom of the big top. The fire began nearby, behind the upper menagerie wagons where the bleachers are lighter and unburnt. The breeze, coming from the lower right of the picture, drove the fire up the length of the tent toward the narrow bandstand dividing the performers' entrance at the upper end. Except for the upper four menagerie cages, the wagons and small tents that surrounded the big top before the fire have been moved away. Among these were the bull top and Harold's paddock, which were probably below the Coca-Cola tent. Abe Fox photo.

clear spot halfway down. Two big generator wagons were dinning away by the sidewall, "warming up" for the performance, but they were too intent on taking the portrait to notice the noise, and "the horse was broke to all kinds of things." Harold stood calmly for the camera, and young Ralph sat straight in the saddle under his tall feathered hat while his father peered down at the focusing screen. Pose, pose, pose; wheeling around a bit to get different angles, and finally they had their pictures. Enough, then, and back to the paddock. Dismount, give hat and coat to Benny, unsaddle, return horse to Buck, change pants, return saddle to car, slam the trunk shut--and get to work.

The afternoon show had just started, a bit late, at 2:23. With the crowds finally out of the menagerie, "the pressure was on" to get the elephants ready for spec, and a dozen bull hands were already busy sweeping them down. Ralph grabbed a broom and joined them. His family stayed and watched. Despite the breeze, it was in the high eighties outside and even hotter in the big top, so the Emersons were not going in until spec started after 3:00. Watching thirty elephants being swept down in a race against the clock was a pretty good show in itself, and Ralph could point out most of the elephants by name now, "not all of them, but more and more. One elephant doesn't look like much, but when you're standing in a line of them, that's one hell of a picture." The sweeping was hot work; "all four corners" of an elephant needed it, and he had two or three elephants to do. Each one lay down on her side ("C'mon down!") and he clambered on top with his broom, his father taking more pictures from the other side of the rope line. "I was sweepin' pretty hard on there. They enjoyed it." When the elephants were all clean of dust and hay a quarter-hour later, it was time to "put their headdresses on and put our own stuff on" for spec. He took advantage of the break to hurry off to the nearest latrine, the public one by the main



This plan drawn after an examination of the ruins, shows the approximate arrangements, but may not be accurate in all details. From *The Circus Fire* published by the National Fire Protection Association International.

entrance, and his family turned to admire the giraffes.

As Ralph Sr. recalled in the letter to his brother: "On the day of the fire, Kitty, Baby George and myself were up visiting Ralph and taking pictures of him sweeping off the elephants and etc. We had just taken a picture of Kitty and George in front of the giraffe pen when we heard the elephants acting up, we thought they were fighting, instead they were trumpeting with their trunks up in the air, then I looked around to see if there were any dogs loose because I knew that they sometimes become frightened when a dog would roam around them. I looked over toward the big top and sure enough the tent had just started to burn, this was what caused the elephants to carry on. Well, from there on out it was terrible. I rushed Kitty and Baby George off the lot for fear the elephants would start to stampede and then I came back and started taking pictures of the fire. I was able to get some excellent shots of all stages of the fire." It began as the Wallendas started their high-wire act at 2:40, most likely because someone flicked a cigarette at the big-top sidewall south of the main entrance.

Quickly reaching the waxed roof and fanned by the breeze, the flames roared eastward down whole length of the tent toward the bandstand five hundred feet away. After depositing his wife and three-year-old on a friendly porch at the other side of Barbour Street, Ralph Sr. took some

hasty photos of the smoke billowing up behind the sideshow top. He and Kitty watched passers-by gather on the sidewalk as men led the elephants out of the menagerie toward the road, followed by the donkeys and camels. The fire wasn't stopping. Curious, and seeing young Ralph safe, he left the porch (George heard "Stay here!") and recrossed the street, returning to the

alleyway behind the tent for more pictures.

By the time the first alarm was pulled at 2:44, most of the crowd had fled outside. The black smoke and wax-fed flames piled higher and higher along the big-top roof until the poles and canvas suddenly collapsed at 2:45. Stunned and frantic, those who fled through the south exits stood watching in the gritty haze, some by the victory-garden fence, some still near the burning tent. As flames bit into the grandstands, tractor crews started pulling wagons away from the sidewalls. Other circus people ran by to help, and Ralph Sr.'s camera caught the sad-faced tramp clown Emmett Kelly rushing along with a water bucket.

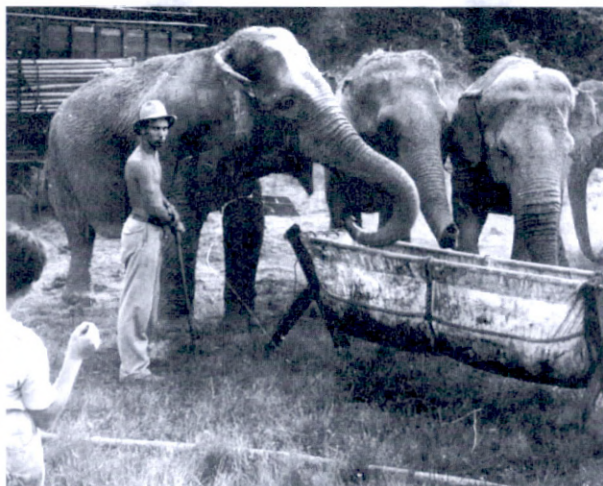
As soon as he noticed the fire, Kelly had run west from the dressing tent and hurried down the southern alleyway toward the flames, instinctively carrying his wash-bucket. The band had already switched from the Wallendas' waltz to the traditional disaster signal *Stars and Stripes Forever*, and Kelly realized "[t]here was nothing I could do . . . because the tent was burning too high from the ground, and the flame was spreading. I could hear the grandstand chairs slamming inside the tent as people stampeded down" and began "pouring through the exits." Seeing an exit choked by crowds halfway down the tent, he pushed his way in and turned "traffic policeman," guiding people out and urging them toward the "victory garden . . . away from the wind," fighting "bottlenecks as well as I could, yelling at the top of my lungs: 'Go on! You can't get back in there! Keep moving, keep moving!'" He held his own against the shoving crowds for four minutes

of terrible noise: shouts and screams keening high against the deafening roar of flames thrumming overhead like constant thunder. As the "frantic, milling mob" swirled around outside, "[s]parks were flying and the heat drove us back," and the fiery roof collapsed, "the center poles . . . crashing one by one."

Now the sidewalls and grandstands began to blaze, their painted chairs flashing up like rows of match-heads. With fresh horror, Kelly saw flames "licking" out toward one of the generator wagons. "People were all around it and wouldn't move. . . . A gasoline tank was built into the wagon and I was afraid that if the fire got into the wagon, the tank would blow up and burn a lot of kids." Still carrying his bucket, he grabbed a ring stock groom by the arm and yelled, "Good God! Come with me! This thing is liable to blow up!" . . . We ran to the horse troughs, filled four buckets and threw the water on the fire." Ralph Sr.'s camera caught them as they ran toward the wagon. "That man behind me in the picture is a horse groom." A few seconds later, Kelly "nearly got it. One of the caterpillar tractors came rumbling along to get that wagon--to hook on and pull it away from the crowd. It was almost on top of me before I realized what was happening, and as it swung around it didn't miss running over me by more than an inch."

By this time fire engines "had arrived . . . and water was being poured onto the big-top area so it would cool enough for firemen to go in." With "so much smoke" around, it wasn't clear if everyone had made it out all right. "Firemen and police were now pushing everybody back," so Kelly returned to the dressing tent with "smarting" eyes and "nerves . . . jumping." Pulling off his clown shoes, he saw them "blistered from walking through hot ashes." Cherishing a rumor that everyone was safe, he and the other performers sat in the dressing tent for a "few minutes . . . without saying much. . . . Then we heard a sound that froze us all. The long, thin wail of an ambulance siren.

Another and another and another until the air was filled with the sound." A few hundred feet west, steadying his camera on its strap, Ralph Sr. was picking his way back through the fire hoses toward the crowded porch on Barbour Street, where his three-year old was watching the "confusion" across the road, the "fire apparatus and the smoke."



Ralph by canvas watering trough in Sponzo's meadow in the days after the fire; note Stetson and bull hook. The two elephants at right are collar-chained together.

All this time, young Ralph had been tending the elephants. Leaving the small latrine between the

menagerie sidewall and the big top's main entrance, he returned to the menagerie through the public gateway at the narrow end and started past the cage wagons toward the elephants. "Somebody hollered 'Fire! Fire!'" He stopped and looked around, seeing a small "V of flame" above the cages to his left, an inverted V in the lower corner of a roof panel. Burning right above the sidewall, it seemed "innocent," a little "wedge" of fire a few feet wide hugging the dark vertical of a hand-laced seam. He thought, "I wonder how they're going to put that out." In the gap above the sidewall he saw the backs of "people on the top row" sitting unaware inside as the flame started climbing the white canvas over their heads, its curly point dancing up the seam "like a snake," the flame widening leftwards, barred from going right by the seam's "stout" rope. "I wanted to get out of

there to do something to get the elephants out of there, but just took a long moment to drink the scene in." The roof panel "devoured itself," the flame jumped the seam, and when it reached the first line of quarter-pole grommets, "pookhhh!--it suddenly burst out" and "took off" as the breeze caught it. Shouts began inside the tent, first a "little roar of panic" and then "bedlam." The elephants were still trumpeting and "Schafer was hollering loud" about getting them off the lot. Ralph ran for the picket line, reached it in seconds, and caught sight of his parents "walking fast" towards Barbour Street holding George's hands.

All the elephant men converged on the picket line and began unchaining their charges, two snaps or a snap and a clevis each, a few seconds here, thirty seconds there; and within two minutes all the elephants were free and being hustled past the side show top towards Barbour Street--"we didn't ride 'em out, we ran 'em out"--some "squealing, some had their tails in the air and that means panic when you see it in an animal." As the line made its way to the curb, Schafer "was at the head of it." The way down the street was already blocked by fire trucks, so the elephants waited in the west lane for a few minutes, "the manure piling up" until a path was finally cleared. "There were lots of cops that made way for the elephants . . . and then cars; for a while they were . . . it was a mess, but we got them out of there." They went south, trooping down the hill to the next corner and halting in an empty lot there, trying to keep the elephants calm, lining them up side by side and "just holdin' 'em there" by voice and persuasion. "Sirens were blaring all over the place, all over the place." Some minutes later they were told to move the elephants to another lot off Cleveland Avenue north of the tent. "They got that lot quick--I don't know how they did that."

To avoid going back up Barbour Street, still choked with crowds and vehicles, they walked the elephants east on Kensington and went cross-lots toward the back of the circus. "We went through a jungle of cars

and victory gardens," emerging near the dressing tent at the east end of the ruined big top, where firemen and others were now busy in the hot sun around the banks of blackened seats and the smoldering bandstand. The tent poles were down, and the canvas was simply gone, evaporated. Off toward the west were ambulances and "screaming," and an awful "stench" met them as they passed the eastern bleachers. Men were carrying burnt bodies out past the bandstand; a cluster of them was already stacked up "like cordwood" nearby, and reservists were hurriedly loading them into army trucks. He stared in "fixation for a moment: 'How could this happen?'" The elephants marched on. Through some woods and down a little dirt road was the rest of the show: the horse tents and the friendly cooktent standing where they had gone up yesterday; and right beside them the new elephant lot, a "shady" meadow behind some houses that was "just about right for the elephants." A circus truck brought their stakes and chains and "hay to calm them down." The elephants relaxed quicker than their keepers; there was "high tension" for hours and "a lot of talking as we stood there."

When Ralph's father returned to the lot that evening to check on him, he was besieged by show acquaintances who heard he'd taken pictures. "All the boys wanted to see them as soon as possible so I brought them down to the local newspaper [the *Hartford Courant*] and had them developed. They liked them so well they asked me if they could use them in their newspaper. Then while there, Associated Press and *Life Magazine* men were there and wanted to buy the pictures. I then knew I had some real pictures and I took a long chance and wired the *Billboard* for an ad on the Circus page offering a set of ten enlarged professional pictures of the 'Circus Fire Disaster' for \$5.00. . . . Just as soon as the [eight-by-eight enlargements of my] pictures get here from the photographer, I'll send you a set. . . . Associated Press paid me twenty dollars and *Life Magazine* paid me fifty dollars and gave me a whole page in their magazine. [The Emmett Kelly shot took up most of p.

30 on July 17.] As a matter of fact, my shot was the only one that appeared in *Life*. From now on out, I shall always try to carry a loaded camera in the car. . . . Well, George, it sure is too bad that all this had to happen, I have seen lots of things but when you see little kids just burned to a char it sure gets you. Yes, those hardened show hands had tears streaming down their faces. It all happened so fast too, just a matter of about fifteen minutes. I think that proper precautions will be taken so as to prevent such a tragedy from happening again."



The big top burning with sidewall dropped. Internet photo.

Bad as it was, the vast majority of people got out all right. Of some eight thousand spectators, all but 167 survived, and the circus lost none of its employees or animals. Yet the season ground to a halt. Hundreds of people had been injured, the tent was in ashes, and much equipment was badly scorched. The police cordoned off the fire site and left "two or three squad cars" nearby. Lawsuits were filed, officials arrested, assets attached. While the show waited for permission to regroup at winter quarters, it remained stranded in Hartford, dogged by rumors that it might have to close for good. With no performances, there wasn't much to do but talk, and gossip focused mostly on what might come next. Little was said about the disaster. "Everybody knew what they had seen. It was blanked out of the mind. Nobody wanted to talk about it. That was for later, much later." Ralph reminded people that he'd mentioned

the omen of "blood on the moon" the night before the fire: "They weren't too impressed."

Fri., July 7. Hartford. *Feed & Watered bulls, had time off till 4. Met Mrs Phau & 2 kids in town. Met dad & went around with him until four. Got off again, went home & saw Mrs. Patterson, and spent time with Shirl.*

The morning *Hartford Courant* had banner headlines about the fire. The Emmett Kelly picture was inside on p. 14, and other papers were running it too. When Kelly came downstairs at the Bond Hotel, he "ran into

Allen Lester, one of our publicity men, . . . who said, 'Emmett, that's quite a picture of you on page one of the *Boston Globe*.' I hadn't seen it because I hadn't wanted to read any papers at all. An amateur photographer . . . had snapped me as I was hurrying along . . . with a water bucket in my hand." He'd forgotten about the bucket until he saw the picture.

Ralph spent the early part of the day with his father, who had already begun arranging to advertise sets of his fire pictures in the *Billboard*. Western Union telephoned the Glastonbury house with the magazine's terms, and by late afternoon they delivered a paper telegram confirming the message: WIRE \$16.80 TODAY FOR ONE INCH DOUBLE COLUMN AD--THE BILLBOARD. Orders for pictures started arriving from around the country within a week, and meanwhile young Ralph began to spend his nights at home and his days with the elephants in Hartford.

Sat., July 8. Hartford. *Just about the same as Yesterday. I got paid & Gave \$1.25 to the Circus Victims Asso.*

Sun., July 9. Hartford. *Another usual day. Everyone is getting tired of waiting and I don't mean maybe. Shaffer was down [at] the house. Me & Family had quite a Chat.*

Mon., July 10. Hartford. *Dad left for New York & we are still here in Hartford. Went upstreet [into town] but their was nothing doing.*

Tues., July 11. Hartford. *We were suppose to leave today but no soap. I got a letter from Ata King in Maine. That was a surprise. Saw Shirl & rode home with her.*

Since the fire had been national news, the Portland girl wrote to ask "if I had gotten hurt or anything like that. It was a nice letter." As a matter of fact, the only man hurt in the Elephant Department was Old Buck, whose hands stayed bandaged for the next few weeks. The elephants stayed in their new meadow, an empty lot owned by a local man named John Sponzo. As the circus waited in Hartford, "there wasn't too much work to do; most of the time we had our own chores done early." But Ralph saw some interesting things.

A few times he went over to see the menagerie animals on Barbour Street near the fire's point of origin. Although the big top's burnt oval was off limits, when he stood by the menagerie wagons and looked at the southeast bleachers, he was struck by the sight of a nearby side pole still standing upright with festoons of canvas dragging off either side, the cloth charred on top but still white near the bottom. Both the bleachers behind it and the patch of grass in front were unscorched; and the fact that the flames had not burned downward there made him think the fire had started up high at that spot, as if someone in the bleachers by the pole had touched a cigarette to the canvas to see if it would burn. "That side pole was there for a couple days."

He also got his first glimpse of a sideshow performer. Riding the circus bus between the train and the lot one day, he was astonished to see armless and legless Frieda Pushnik sitting on another woman's lap, happily chatting away with the other passengers, "a doll of a woman" and "just the most gossipy thing on the show!"

And one lazy afternoon, he saw an "unforgettable little performance" by one of the elephants. Just before watering time, the bull hands and some "lucky towners" were quietly watching the picketed herd "contentedly chewing hay." The men had been "sitting around telling stories about which elephant was smartest," and

one of the bosses nodded over and said, "Watch that old cow. We're gonna see something." Nobody had been "paying too much attention to the rattle of the picket chains and leg chains, and we all kinda stopped and watched her."

Using the tip of her trunk, the elephant had already worked off her front leg chain and was working on "the hind leg." Once free, she turned around "just normal, almost as if she knew all eyes were on her," and walked over to the canvas watering trough, which hadn't been filled yet. "Nothing in it, and she kinda slapped the bottom of it, annoyed that there wasn't something to drink." So she continued on to the water truck, which was parked about fifty feet away. Feeling along the top of the tank with her trunk, she found the cap, screwed it off, "laid the cap down on of the tank," put her trunk



A group of burned wagons. Pfening Archives.

inside, and took a long drink, "the guys all clappin', the roustabouts and the few townspeople. That was the whole show, and somebody hollered, 'Want me to put her back?'"

The boss said, "No, just watch--we're gonna see something more." Sure enough, the elephant went over to her work partner's place in line and undid her two chains. Then she "beckoned--there's sounds that elephants do--and both of 'em walked to the water truck." The second elephant leisurely drank her fill and everybody cheered again. Then the boss said, "Come on, girls, get back in your places!" and they walked right back to the line and started eating hay again, pretending nothing unusual had happened. "That's a true story. I wish I could remember

the names."

Wed., July 12. Hartford. *Rode to Work with Phaus. Work was Rutine. Took a bath & came [back] to the lot with Pfau. Got chased off [the fire site by a cop]. Saw Shirl to say Good Nite too.*

Thurs., July 13. Hartford. *Rode to work with Phaus again. Work was routin. Came home, ate, went to Pratts, Shirls. Had quite a visit. Upstreet & home with Rush [Casper] & Brud Pratt.*

Fri., July 14. Hartford. *Morning same as yesterday. I tried to plait rawhide today & I did succeed. I went home at night & got back to the lot just in time. The Show is Going.*

Early that evening, the courts finally gave the circus permission to go home to Florida, and the men immediately started loading the animals and equipment. Ralph was in Glastonbury but suspected something

might be happening that night, so his father drove him back to the lot after dark. It was already practically empty. He got a ride to the rail yards and fell asleep on the train.

Sat., July 15. En Route to Sarasota, Fla. *Woke up in New Haven. Rode the*

Cabose to Maybrook N.Y. where we made our first feed & water stop. Went to the town, it wasn't much. We left & are going.

Ralph was on the "first section," the first of the circus' three trains and the one that carried the elephants. The circus owned its own rail cars, but the engines, cabooses, and train crews were supplied by the railroads, and the trainmen invited him along in the caboose for part of the trip. The talk inside was all "exaggerations. We were just telling stories higher than one another, outdoing one another talking. I was the only one in the car that was from the show, so they had a lot of questions: 'Where you from?' and so forth and so on. I think those guys had Southern drawls." The best of it was "I got all the coffee I wanted to drink." After Maybrook he rode the flatcars.

Then he lost his hat. "The sad

thing about that hat is, when we were pulling out of the New England area and the train was heading out there toward the Jerseys, we were just sitting on the flats kinda hangin' on. We were going through this poorish farmland, and dammit, this hat just flew offa my head--a Stetson, mind you!--and I watched it land on the ground and twirl away on the brim. It caused quite a commotion--there was a 'Maybe if you jump now, Ralph, you can get the next section'--but the track was up on a little embankment and I didn't think I'd be able to get up there and grab the iron on the other train. So there was some old farmer who came home that night with a brand-new hat, or next to a brand-new hat. It built a deep sense of loss when I told Possum Red: he mumbled something and I mumbled back. And I don't know yet whether he missed me or the hat more."

Sun., July 16. Enroute. Woke up in Philia. Penn. Made friend[s] with the train men & had quite a chat with them. Saw Wash. D.C. [from the train], it was OK. Feed at Potomac RR yards in Virginia. Still traveling.

This was a bad day for Piccolo Pete. After the elephants had their drink at the water tower in the rail yards, a lot of guys lined up with towels to take a quick open-air shower. Ralph got "under the water" and back to the flats early. Piccolo Pete was at the end of the line. "He got his bath," but the train whistled in the middle of it. "As soon as that toot-toot sounded, they usually got off to a pretty slow start, but on this particular line they had exceptionally fast engines," and poor Pete had to run after the train, nude and "barefoot on those damn stones, those crushed stones, holding his bundle of clothes and shoes." He swung himself up on the steps of one of the last cars, but he was "on the platform side, which made it doubly comical," because a minute later the train rumbled right by a station platform with Pete clinging on and all the crowds gaping at him.

Luckily they pulled into another siding and he was able to get aboard. Missing trains was always a danger. There might be a little extra time after the animals were taken care of

at feed stops, but "you'd stay close" because you never knew how long the train would stay put. "There had been stops where people missed it by going too far afield, to a bakery or a liquor shop."

Feed stops were usually pretty quick, barely an hour, and involved roughly the same procedure for horses and elephants alike. Local trucks would be standing by with hay bales and sacks of grain ("sweet feed"). As soon as the train stopped, circus crews would roll out special strips of canvas and fill them with hay while the animals were being unloaded. Each stock car had a thick wooden ramp under the door that slid into a possum belly between the wheels; sliding it out took "six guys and it was still heavy." The elephants were unchained, led down the ramp, and lined up in front of the canvas to eat their hay. A few men stood by to oversee this while the rest cleaned the manure out of the cars with shovels and pitchforks--on long jumps, "a heck of a lot of manure." This was picked up by the locals and trucked away as quickly as possible. Forty minutes into the stop, the animals had finished their hay, so the grain was emptied onto the canvas in front of them. In the few minutes it took for the elephants to scoop up all the grain in the curls of their trunks, a thin layer of clean hay was spread in the cars for them to stand on. If there was a water tower nearby, the folding canvas troughs would be set out and filled, and the elephants led over in small groups to drink. Then they were led back into the railroad cars and re-chained while other crews swept and rolled the canvas strips and stowed them in another car. The ramp slid back into the possum belly, the men dispersed to whatever cars they'd been riding on, and off the train went.

Mon., July 17. Enroute. Woke up in South Carolina. We watered & feed in Charleston & had a 6 hour delay because of a train wreck. Went to sleep early. I was on watch all day.

In this case, on watch meant staying in one of the elephant cars with a partner. They brought along nothing to drink, and ate from "dukey bags" handed out by the cookhouse crew before the run: paper bags with sand-

wich, hard-boiled egg, fruit, and cookies. They left the car door open and watched the lower South come into view: flat green land, "light livestock," occasional "shacks and shanties," and "lots of dirt roads."

Tues., July 18. Enroute. Woke up in Romeo Fla & really saw a lot of Palm trees, orange trees etc. Landed in Saratoga at 1:15. Worked all afternoon. Went to town at night & Slept in coaches [the "Connecticut" car, parked on the winter quarters siding].

Wed., July 19. Sarasota. We had work here about like on the road but I had a look around the place. At night I went for a horseback ride with Char. Vitter. He got clipped by a car & his horse & he got banged good. We rode to town & we had quite a time.

The spacious winter quarters in Sarasota had buildings for all the different circus departments. The elephant building was a stable and bunkhouse wrapped around a courtyard containing a single practice ring. The insides were neat and airy. "We kept it swept out," and the cockroaches mostly stayed out of sight. Off to one side of the building was a full-sized mockup of all the show's rings and stages for rehearsals. On the other side, near the elephants' manure pile, was a big "neglected" barn, half hidden by bushes "like a haunted house." Exploring alone, Ralph found a loose board and slipped in. It was amazing inside, like "finding a whole new circus," for it was "piled high" with forgotten equipment and "old circus wagons," their gold leaf "glinting" in the dusky light. "I must have spent half a day there, just staring."

Next to winter quarters was a horse and cattle ranch owned by "a Florida cracker" named C. V. Whitaker, and that evening Ralph and two buddies went over to rent some horses and ride downtown. Whitaker decided to go with them. It was all very rural; an unpaved road led into town, and they tied up their horses behind the Alligator Bar, where "I think I was getting away with beer." They left after ten and started riding back single file, Ralph in front and Charlie Whitaker just behind. With no moon and "no streetlights out in those areas of Sarasota," it was "so dark we could hardly see

the road or any landmarks."

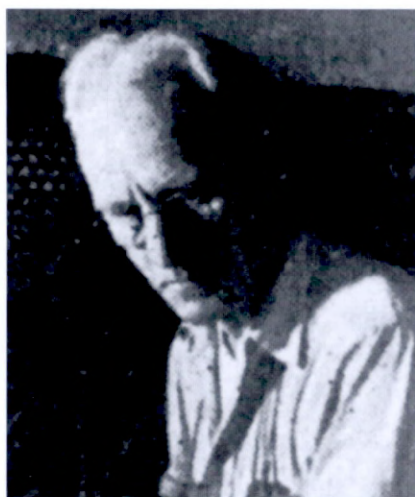
Speaking for the record a week later, he described what happened next: "[A]t between 10:30 and 11:00 P.M. myself and 2 other [circus] employees, I only know their nicknames . . . were riding with Whitaker east on Fruitville Road. We were on left side of road and we saw a car approaching with bright lights at fairly fast rate of speed. . . . [T]he car struck Whitaker. . . . injured Whitaker's leg and the horse and damaged the saddle. We were within a yard of the curb at the time of the accident. . . . The cab didn't stop, but did slow down some distance away, then continued. When we returned to Whitaker's a policeman was there who told us of a negro passenger in the cab having a broken arm and that cab belonged to Texas-Jones Cab Company. I was uninjured, as I was not involved in the accident."

Thurs., July 20. Sarasota. *The morning was just about the same though it rained. I saw Charly & he is getting along ok. E. Santana started making 2 [bull] hooks for me today for a belt. Got a check & my 1A [draft] card from Home. Went to town for those.*

Getting on an almost empty city bus to go into town, Ralph went to sit in back "as I would have on a school bus, and the driver honked and said come up. I didn't know what he wanted, and he gave me a little lecture," angrily saying the back seats were for negroes only. "Oh, is that right?" That was news to a Northern kid, "so I sat in the seat behind him" and saw that the negroes who got on at the next few stops were indeed all going to the back.

Downtown Sarasota was delightful, and Ralph went in often. "I fished, if you could imagine such a thing. You could do that. The center of town was right on the Gulf of Mexico, for gosh sakes. I liked the warmth of the water." But on this day he went downtown to pick up a registered airmail letter. His father wrote: "I just finished talking over the phone to your Draft Board, and they feel quite sure that you will not have to report for your physical examination much before the 15th of August.

So if I were you, I would make train reservations out of Florida not



Coke Whitey, aka George Warner.

much later than August 5th. This is going to give you additional time to work with the circus and get the feel of that Sarasota sunshine. . . . We received your card from Maybrook, New York. Glad to know that everything is going along smoothly. We want you to write to us every day when you get to Winter Quarters. Let us know your plans. Give my regards to Curly and the boys, tell Curly I'll send him a set of pictures just as soon as they are ready. . . . Mother and brother George are getting along fine. They are looking forward to your return and so am I. Take good care of yourself."

One of Ralph's projects in Sarasota was getting some extra bull hooks. Ordinarily the circus provided bull hooks; a "bundle" of them was always available in the wardrobe wagon. But Ralph wanted his own, and thought he could sell a few besides. Circus fans always wanted to buy them, and two elephant men were good at making them. Old Gus from Sweden had been a blacksmith and could forge the steel hook, and Elmer Santana could do the rest.



A bull hook.

Fresh from the anvil, the steel part of an American bull hook is a rough L about four inches high and a quarter of an inch thick. The short leg of the L is the "hook" itself, about three inches long and hooked over at the

tip like a seagull's beak. The long leg of the L is simply a shank; most of it is hidden inside the tip of a three-foot hickory stockman's cane, although its lower end extends half an inch past the L's joint to make a goad, giving the steel the profile of a high-heeled shoe with a turned-up toe. In the finished bull hook, the toe points upward toward the wooden crook of the cane's J, mirroring its curve like the bottom of a very tall C, and lined up with it so the cane lies flat if you set it down on its side.

After Gus forged the steel, Santana filed it smooth and carefully blunted it; fitted the shank into the cane, wrapped the wooden tip in a brass ferrule, and riveted it all together. In return, Ralph gave him a braided leather belt made with the technique he'd been practicing the week before in Hartford. When the bull hook was complete, Ralph carved his name in the handle.

Fri., July 21. Sarasota. *Work was the same only we had ring practice with the elephants. E. Santana finished my hook. At night Santana & I had quite a mouth organ jamboree.*

"There was a lot of harmonica playing among the working men." Santana had a harmonica, "and I had bought a very good chromatic Hohner shifting harmonica, and I loaned it out to a lot of guys--and it always came back. Gus used it. He was enthralled with it--he'd never had one of those chromatic ones."

Sat., July 22. Sarasota. *Work was same with practice too. We got paid today & I slicked up & went to town. Saw the town with Elmer, Myres & Shiply. At night I heard the best piano player I ever heard, Tex Rowins [or Rollins]. I listened awed.*

Sun., July 23. Sarasota. *A kind of easy day. I went riding with Whitake[r]s Daughter Marge. I went to town with the boys. At night I wrote a letter to Joe & it sure is about time. Also broke my watch strap. Had quite a chat with Coke Whitey.*

This was the nickname of Ringling's harness-maker George Warner, the man to see about a watch strap. Coke Whitey was "in his sixties or seventies" and "legendary in many of those horse shows." He did repairs on the circus as it traveled during the season and then cut new harness "all



winter long" with "machinery down in Sarasota. We talked a lot. His thing was making as many belts as he could turn out on the side, and he had to pay off the guy above him."

Mon., July 24. Sarasota. *Work was about the same only it rained in the middle of the day & that slowed things down. In the evening I watched the first rehearsal & had quite a talk with Shipley.*

This rehearsal was the first of many to get the circus ready to start performing again. The elephant boss Shipley was "probably the guy I liked best on the show." He had once "raised mules and ponies" in Missouri, a "good stock man" turned "old circus man."

Tues., July 25. Sarasota. *Work was usual in the afternoon, it was fairly easy at night. Jessy had colic & I had my first chance to see a little bull doctoring. Went to bed under the hay wagon. Also insurance man & C.V.W. had me sign witness paper.*

Wed., July 26. Sarasota. *We rehearsed our act with music this morning & Gus broke 3 hook[s] trying to make me one. Santana gave me another. I got a tel[egram] from Dad. At night we rehearsed again. Ate, then to R.S. & Johnnies.*

When Ralph said the circus would be starting for Ohio soon, his father wired him to "stay with it until we notify you to come east." Meanwhile, his interest in bull hooks had started a fad. Now Shipley and a few other men also wanted new ones, so Gus brought them all down to the blacksmith shop and started working on Ralph's first. Gus was "a very good man with an anvil" who'd "made a lot of bull hooks," but on this day he was "in a hurry" and ruined three in a row. He was about to try again when

The Sarasota winter quarters elephant compound in 1944. Pfening Archives.

"Shipley looked at me and said, 'Emerson, at least let him cool down a little so we can have a chance at them too!'"

Thurs., July 27. Sarasota. *Work & acts were same in morning. Gus got my hook finished. In the evening we had almost the complete show with music & it sure was fun. Had egg sandwich & to bed.*

Fri., July 28. Sarasota. *Today was much the same as yesterday as far as Work & etc. Got a letter from Shirl. Learned a very good 5¢ lesson at the cookhouse.*

He also wrote but forgot to mail at least two letters, using Ringling notepaper and drawing a tiny elephant by his name in each envelope's return address.

He told his parents that the show would leave for Ohio on Sunday. "There is nothing new here except that we have been rehearsing the whole show, so I've finally seen it, and in Sarasota at that. Well I guess I'll be leaving in Akron so it shall not be long before I'll be home but if I'm 4F [unfit for army service] I think I'll join again on Ringstock. . . . I will try & send you cards while I'm [on] the way north, but don't be disappointed if I miss sometimes because at some of those water stops we sure do not stay long & a lot of the boys were left behind trying to make Run's."

Shirley wrote from Glastonbury: "I finally received your card last Saturday. I expected to hear from you the next time from Chicago. I understand by listening to the radio that it (the circus) lands next in Akron Ohio. That sounds exciting. Are you going

there too or are you heading for home?????? If I remember correctly you were coming back to town after a weeks stay in Sarasota. That sure has been a long week. I presume that the draft hasn't caught up with you as yet. Don't let it bother you Ralphie because the war is going to be over before they catch you. . . . Incidentally I am still holding a grudge against that cop for chasing us off the circus grounds. If I ever meet him again so help me, well, I don't know exactly what I will do. Perhaps I will run the other way, no????"

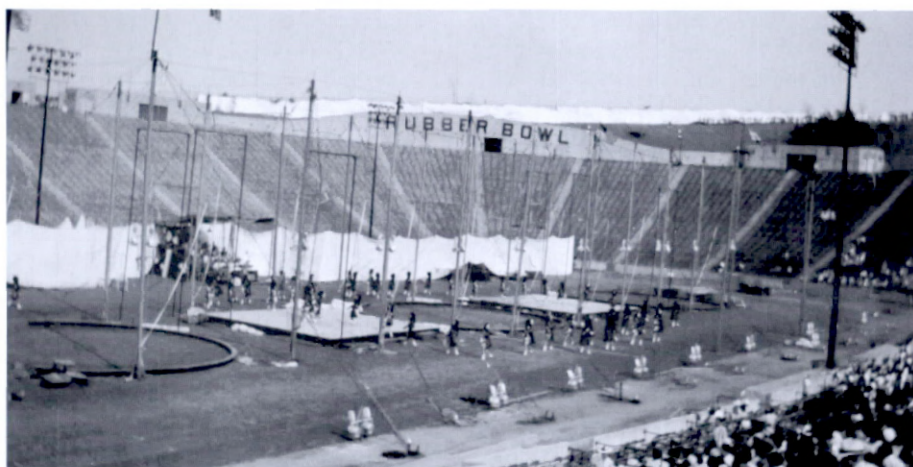
He answered: "Hi Shirl! Well I guess this is the last letter you'll get from me in Florida for quite a while because we are going to start (and no kidding!) 9 A.M. Sunday Morning. I got your letter today and it sure was nice to here from you. Well it sure is hot right now and in a few minutes we start our evening rehearsal (4 hours in coustom). We have two of these a day & they sure are fun but its really hot at times. Well I just got called to clean my elephants so I'll have to cut it short."

When the rehearsal finally ended late at night, he went to the cookhouse and bought another fried-egg sandwich for five cents. But the cookhouse was officially closed, and when he gave the cook a dime, he didn't get his nickel back. Lesson: Bring exact change to a black market.

Sat., July 29. Sarasota. *Work same. Payday. I bought a new shirt, a [shell] bracelet & pin, plus sweets. Went to Lido Beach & had a swell time. Came home with Shipley & Santana with fish we got. A real nice day.*

This was the last full day in Sarasota. During the stay there, the show had been frantically replacing and restoring equipment and arranging a new touring schedule. The elephant men did their part by painting the herd with neat's-foot oil to "darken them up" and soften their hides. Still minus the big top but otherwise "spic and span," as the route book said later, the circus was now ready to "return to the road with performances in open air arenas, instead of under canvas."

Sun., July 30. Enrout to Akron



Ohio. We shoved off this morning at 9 AM. I was on watch in the car (28) alone all day & it sure was a pretty ride but coaches are crowded.

Mon., July 31. Enroute. Woke up in Georgia. We stopped to feed & water a few miles out of Atlanta. When we got there I bought a watermelon for a \$.25. It rained off & on today.

Reporters met the train at its stop. "[I]n the mist early Monday," said the evening *Atlanta Journal*, "30 elephants soft-footed off freight car ramps" and lined up along the train. "With Big Trilby at their lead, and Big Ruth shepherding them from the rear, the elephants hurried toward a watering tank fixed for them on the railroad tracks, and siphoned their trunks full of cool water, shooting it in jet-propelled squirts into their thirsty mouths. Around them, stretching for blocks along the railroad," long rows of "polished horses lowered their noses into tubs and tanks, stamping flies as they drank. Not a trumpet was heard, nor a whinny." A newspaperman "with a camera" came by the elephant cars, "chatted" with Ralph and his watch partner for a few minutes, and took some pictures.

Before the train left, two black men trundled by with wheelbarrows selling watermelons at a quarter apiece. Ralph and his partner decided to get one. Actually, "I bought it. I don't think the other guy had any money at all. Most of 'em didn't carry much." When he set the watermelon down on the floor for a moment, the nearest elephant promptly reached over and stole it. "I can still look up and see that elephant with the juice

The Greatest Show on Earth when it reopened in the Akron, Ohio Rubber Bowl. Pfening Archives.

coming out of its mouth!" Too mad to buy another one, he gnawed some shreds of melon off a bit of rind that had dropped in the hay, the elephant looking on with "a twinkle in her eye" and "a satisfied look on her face."

July "Memoranda." Here was a month! I never traveled so far or have never seen the equal to the fire in Hartford. This is the month I thought I'd leave the show but in turn it is the month I saw real circus-ing. I hope the army doesn't need me because there sure is too much I want to see & do. This is a month that I'll sure not forget in a hurry.

Tues., Aug. 1. Enroute. Have gone thru Geo. Tenn. Ken. & we water & fed in Cincinnati Ohio. We spent a long time in those yards. Trip is pretty. We passed Columbus O. at 9 P.M. Still going.

Wed., Aug. 2. Akron. Arrived at about 10:30 AM on lot. We are in the Rubber Bowl. We got the bulls & our [bull] top up around 9 at night. Then I went to town & wired home. I slept out & it sure is nice.

Thurs., Aug. 3. Akron. Work wasn't much but we had 2 rehearsals & in the evening one I messed the works. Got a letter from Mom & pictures from dad, also a copy of my testimony in Florida.

His mother wrote: "How does it feel to be back on the road travelling with the show? Bet it's quite exciting for you all over again. . . . Dad also delivered a set of pictures this noon. He has done very well with them so far. Life pd. him \$50 for Emmett Kellys

picture because it occupied a full page. Not so bad eh? . . . We all miss you around here. Geo. wants to know when you are coming home. Have put up 33 qts. of string beans from our garden. Today Mr. Pratt sent over some nice sweet corn. First corn this year. We have already had a few of our tomatoes from garden. Well Son I've got to get this kid brother of yours off to bed so will sign off with lots of love & kisses from us all."

The atmosphere at the circus in Akron was "makeshift." The Rubber Bowl's U of bleachers surrounded a football field open to the sky and crammed with the circus rings and stages. Everything else was scattered outside the stadium—animals, wagons, sideshow, cooktent—and every now and then planes flew overhead from the nearby Akron airport. The elephants were picketed outside near the horse tents. The ring stock men seldom mixed with the bull hands; they were "always shining up horses, a good bunch of guys; a lot of them were American Indians." But Ralph had practiced some trick riding at home and knew an acrobat rider on the show, and one afternoon the acrobat and "a couple of guys from ring stock" invited him to take a ride on a white rosinback. That was unusual, but "Why don't you try it? It's all right." So he took the reins, stood up on the horse with knees flexed, "cantered up and down" once, and gave him back. "Maybe they were hoping I'd fall off."

On Thursday night, when the show was "running through the rough spots" in its final rehearsal, he missed a musical cue in the Long Mount and pulled his elephant the wrong way, starting a chain reaction. He escaped notice, but Robert Ringling stopped the rehearsal cold and "the band got chewed out. Nobody talked about it" later!

Fri., Aug. 4. Akron. Well we're back in the groove. We had our two shows today & I kind of think there the last two I'll be in for quite a while but I sure hope not.

Sat., Aug. 5. Akron. Well I thought I'd leave today & see the show in the afternoon but instead I made the 2 shows & was glad I did. I got my final pay for all the time here. It has been a rainy day.

That same evening, his father in Connecticut was reading his brother George's answer to that long letter from late July: "I was sure surprised when you told me that you was the guy who got all those good action pictures of the fire. To be truthful I was a little scared to write you. Thinking the worst. I had a little excitement also. On July 1, I had a little battle with the Chimp, the one who plays Cheeta in the Tarzan pictures. When the battle was over I was on my way to the ache & pain joint, meaning of course the hospital, where they gave me a spinal, & then put 14 stitches in my leg. But I am good as new again. Wensday we are taking the 3 Elephants to Del Mar, at a navy airport, on Location. Making a picture called Lighter than Air, with Wallace Beery, & by the way, Beery is an ex Barnum show Bull hand."

Ralph Sr. typed in reply: "[A]m sorry that Cheeta had the Moxie to bark you up. . . . I sent your set of pictures just a week ago today. How do you like them? I have sold over forty sets so far. . . . We received a wire from young Ralph, he is in Akron, Ohio and plans to leave the circus there and come home to get ready to go into the army."

The evening show over, the young elephant man turned in for the last time in the Ohio darkness. "I was sad to leave."

Sun., Aug. 6. Enroute to Hartford Ct. *Quite a day. I left the show & flew from Akron to Erie Pa. & Rode train rest of the way to Buffalo. Lost & regained my suitcase. Caught the 10:00 PM Train for Hartford.*

Since the stadium was right next to the airport, Ralph decided to fly the first hundred miles home. It was a quiet cloudy day; he put on a clean work shirt and said his goodbyes. While he was patting his favorite elephants on the picket line, Possum Red came over and "we looked at the elephants" together. Then Red went over to Sparks Show Babe, "pulled one hair out of the elephant's tail and gave it to me, and said, 'You'll always have good luck with this.' I carried that for years. It was a gesture: he was rough and tough and he couldn't think of anything better than a charm to get in a fight and win." Last were goodbyes with Curly and

Shipley. "Thanked 'em, shook hands." Shipley was "enthused" that Ralph was flying to Erie. "He was really awed by airplanes. He'd flown around, and he was still awed. He asked if I'd ever been on a long airplane trip. I said no, just Piper Cubs and things. He said, 'Wait till you see how fast you get there--you won't believe it!'"

A silvery two-engine prop plane was waiting at the airport when he walked over in late afternoon and picked up his ticket. The passengers boarded on a roll-up staircase and were greeted inside by stewardesses; Ralph went up the aisle carrying his bull hook and suitcase and found his seat on the left side of the plane. He was looking out the window when they took off; the plane "rose fast" and he was surprised by a quick and "perfect view" of the circus as they passed above the stadium: the three rings inside the "fishbowl," the tiny department tents pitched on the gravel parking lots, "the little animals walking on the ground; even the elephants looked small." The circus looked strangely "shabby" from above, and he suddenly realized why: "What made it look so pathetic were the bare rigging poles, no canvas--just totally wrong, just barren without the big top." The plane veered away and the stadium dropped out of sight.

Gray skies out the window, a low and bumpy ride, and finally "water and wind" rippling the lake as they came into the Erie airfield. A bus took him downtown to the railroad station where he began his train trip home. By dusk he was in Buffalo's Central Terminal checking the schedule for Hartford trains. He admired the big stuffed buffalo in the cavernous waiting room: "I didn't realize there were buffalo that far east." With a few hours to kill, he went into the Sunday streets to find an open lunch counter. "I would probably have gone for pie and coffee, maybe hamburgers, even." When he'd filled up, he strolled back to the station in the dark--and realized he'd left his suitcase behind. Still gripping the bull hook, he ran back to the luncheonette, relieved to find it still open and his suitcase still there, its dull black sides even more battered

than in June.

The New York Central train going east at ten was nearly empty, and the stiffly upholstered seats wouldn't recline when he tried to doze. Seeing "there was no way to get comfortable" no matter how he curled up, he endured a long and sleepless night until the train finally rolled into Manhattan a little before dawn. At Grand Central station he switched to a New York, New Haven & Hartford train that soon slid northeast under electric power, clicking over the elevated tracks above the blue Bronx and then rushing beside Long Island Sound as the sun rose over the coast. After a brief wait in New Haven for a steam engine to hook on, the train turned north and chugged up the Quinnipiac valley to Hartford, and Ralph alighted just after eight o'clock at Union Place, where taxis were waiting by the produce market within sight of the gold-domed Capitol. An hour later his mother was telling him to air out his suitcase: "Leave that outside!"

Mon., Aug. 7. So. Glastonbury. *What a night sleeping in a coach! Arrived in Hart. 8:12 AM. Got bus home, took a bath and went to bed all afternoon. Took a ride with folks for Ice Cream at night.*

Tues., Aug. 8. So. Glastonbury. *Got my physical notice today. Went uptown, got a haircut. I fixed my whip. Saw Shirl at night, got Harold [Pfau]'s car tires fixed. Went upstreet. Things are too tame.*

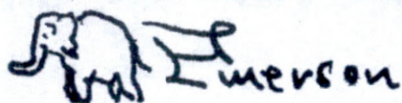
Fri., Aug. 11. So. Glast. . . . *It sure is dead around here.*

Tues., Aug. 15. So. Glastonbury. *Well things are moving again. I went to New Haven for my [army] physical and it sure felt good to travel again. This evening I'm just catching up on my letters.*

August "Memoranda." Well I guess my circus days are over for a while. I've missed it & I guess its left me with thoughts & views I won't forget. They'er probly bad but-- The rest of the month has been a real difference.

In early September, Ralph's draft notice still hadn't arrived, so he began college. The notice finally came a few days into October, and he joined the army on October 13. Even though diaries were strictly forbid-

den, he spirited his in and kept writing until he returned home two years later. On his second day in uniform he noted: "Food is something like the circus." Much in army life reminded him pleasantly of the circus, and he was reunited with horses later that month when he arrived in Ft. Riley, Kansas, to train with the remnants of the U.S. Cavalry. Like the circus, the cavalry touched his inborn love of man-and-beast teamwork on a grand scale. To be part of a huge troop riding in formation under the night sky, with bridles jingling and steel-shod hooves striking sparks on the rocks--that was as close to heaven as a Ringling spec. His "Memoranda" for December concluded happily: "As far as 44 goes it sure has been a year of change and firsts for me. Wouldn't



mind living it over."

NOTES

1. *The diary*. Written by Ralph L. Emerson, Jr., annotated with his help by his son Ralph H. Emerson, and supplemented with the letters and photos of Ralph L. Emerson, Sr. The original diary entries, printed in italics, are quoted in their entirety, original spellings mostly intact. There wasn't much space under each date to write: "Scribble and it was done. Sometimes it took longer than others. I tried to do it every day." Annotations begin a new line, and clarifications are in square brackets []. Again, please note that all words and phrases in quotation marks are exact quotes from conversations with Ralph Jr., except when another source is clearly identified, such as a letter or an interview with another family member--and remember that both elder Ralphs have brothers named George. Warm thanks go to the younger George Emerson for some of the photos, to Shirley Pfau Henry for permission to reprint her letters, and to Richard J. Reynolds III for tracking down the *Atlanta Journal* photo and the true size of the elephant herd; as well as to Fred D. Pfening, Jr., Fred D. Pfening III, Pastor Paul G. Emerson, Holly Emerson, Ellen Pratt, Eric



Car no. 28 on the front page of the July 31 *Atlanta Journal*: "Pictured is 'Big Ruth.'" Ralph leans on his bull hook at right, shielding his face from hay.

Milikowski. Sally Ruef, and A. H. Saxon.

2. *The Elephant Department*. The figure of thirty-seven men is from the July 6 deposition by Ringling's manager George W. Smith, reprinted in *Bandwagon* (July-August, 2005). The daily count would have varied over the season as men joined and left.

Curly's last name rhymes with wafer.

No one was ever sure how to spell it, but the route book says *S-c-h-a-f-e-r*. Richard Reynolds found the figure of thirty elephants in one of George Smith's own records in the Pfening Archives.

Throughout this article, exact figures of all kinds are mostly from the Ringling route book and program. Round figures ("about twenty feet," etc.) are educated guesses, as are many descriptions of sequences of events; but no details of any kind are wholly invented except some of the dialogue and stage business in the *present-tense* accounts of specific jobs in June. The commands and operational details are exact, or nearly so. Warm thanks for this go to our friend Whitey Baker, longtime assistant to Rex Williams on the Beatty show. He

confirmed and explained many points about working elephants and setting up and tearing down a big top, and took care to sift out specific Beatty details. (Every show did things a little differently.)

Also helpful were "How World's Largest Big Top Is Raised" in the 1938 program, "Circus Day 'Round the Clock" in the 1947 program, and the wonderful July 1947 *Fortune* article on Ringling's "Circus Logistics" that Charles Philip Fox reprinted in *A Ticket to the Circus* (1959). So too Chang Reynolds' "The Ringling Elephants 1888-1967" in *Bandwagon* (September-October, 1968) and especially Joseph T. Bradbury's nicely illustrated account of the 1944 Ringling season in *White Tops* (May-June and July-August, 1981), whose lists of animals and equipment are invaluable.

Here is the corrected elephant list for that year, with Smith's spellings in italics. He used the bull hands' traditional designations Big and Little to distinguish elephants with the same name, abbreviating them B. and L. The herd numbered thirty-nine at the start of the season: nine elephants stayed in Sarasota and thirty went on the road. Smith listed them by their assignments to the yellow stock cars. Car no. 28 carried eleven elephants: *Mert* or *Myrtle*, *Eva*, *B. Jenny*, *B. Babe*, [*Big*] *Ruth*, *B. Jewel*, *B. Trilby*, *Mary*, *Sparks Babe*, *Nellie*, and *L. Trilby*. Car No. 29 carried twelve: *Queen*, *Sudan* (the African pygmy), *Judy*, *Tony*, *Josky*, *L. Babe*, *L. Jewel*, [*Big*] *Modock* [*sic*], *Palm*, *Katy*, *Tilly*, and *Lois*. Car No. 30 carried seven: *Marcella*, *Minnie*, *Dolly*, *Emma*, *L. Ruth*, *Pinto*, and *R. Jenny* (for Ringling).

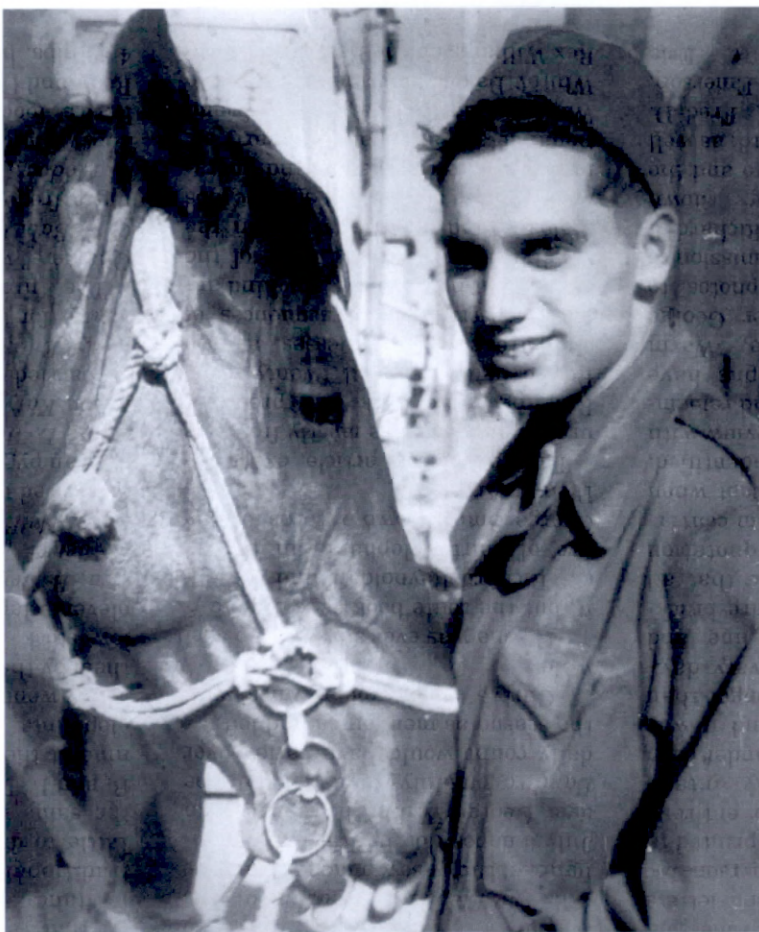
The nine elephants "Left in Quarters" were *Margaret*, *Jess*, *Vick*, *C. C. Babe* (for Cross-Country, meaning a frequent runaway), *W. Nellie*, *W. Modock*, *W. Jenny*, *L. Modock*, and *Topsy*. Smith's list concludes with the herd's food requirements: "Feed--Road and [Madison Square] Garden: 4,000 lbs. hay per day, 16 bu. oats a

day, 200 lbs. of bran once a week."

The three W's near the end of the list stand for Wallace; those elephants came from the Hagenbeck-Wallace show, as did several others listed, including Little Babe. (Chang Reynolds says the common elephant name Babe was originally short for the nineteenth-century elephant name Babylon.) If a newcomer acquired from another show had the same name as a veteran member of the herd, she was generally styled Little, making the veteran Big by default, even if the nicknames didn't match the physical sizes. As herd leader, Ruth was too well known to need a B. in Smith's list, and likewise the dancer Modoc.

As for the men, the list of "Elephant Dept." personnel in the 1944 route book begins with "Superintendent" Fred Schafer, so written, and three "Assistants": Vernon Duffy, Robert C. Clark, and Richard Shipley. Then come twenty-one workers: John Allen, William Bennett, Lowell Brideson, Walter H. Chauvin, Louis Clayton, Chester Damon, Oliver Davies, Jr., Ralph Fillion, Frederick J. Garvey, Earl Hammer, Arnie W. Honkala, Stephen A. Jacyna, Roy Jones, Bill J. Kuhn, Valentino S. Marra, Benjamin Rosen, Elmer J. Santana, Stanley L. Scheller, James Silver, Fred A. Stahler, and James L. Thompson. The list is incomplete, of course, and no mention is made of Edward Allen, who was Superintendent at the very beginning of the season. Possum Red was a boss, but his real name is a mystery, as is the identity of the "Professor" in Connie Clausen's book (see below, and note that her "Ginny" is really a Jenny).

3. *Hartford*. Moonrise in Hartford on July 5 was at 8:08 p.m., the performance began at 8:15, and the astronomical full moon for July was



Ralph with a Japanese cart horse in Osaka in 1946.

four hours later, at 12:27 a.m. on the morning of the 6th (see aa.usno.navy.mil). These are all in Daylight Saving Time, which was in effect during the war under the name War Time. The *Post* story was made into a movie in 1948.

Background on the fire is mostly from Stewart O'Nan's marvelous account *The Circus Fire: A True Story* (2000), which has many helpful diagrams and photographs, including most of Ralph Sr.'s fire photos and Ralph Jr.'s description of the first moments of the fire. That's what stuck: "I'll never forget that V." Clown Felix Adler saw it too, from the east a few moments later. Hearing sounds like convulsive laughter coming from the crowd in the big top, Adler said, "I ran out of the dressing tent. I saw a small blaze on the tent. It looked so small, I told myself, 'Our boys will get that in a minute.' Then a sudden gust of wind struck. It hit hard enough to shake the poles in the dressing tent.

It was fate, that wind." Like Emmett Kelly and many other performers, Adler began guiding people out: "We had an awful time getting people to move away from the tent, once we got them out. They stood there, gaping" (*White Tops*, July-August, 1981, p. 23). Emmett Kelly's memories are combined from his own *Clown: My Life in Tatters and Smiles* (1957, co-written with F. Beverly Kelley, no relation) and Barbara Carlson's *Hartford Courant* article "A Bucket Against an Inferno" on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the fire (July 6, 1969). Other than his pictures, the only account of Ralph Sr.'s experience at the fire seems to be the one quoted in full here from the letter to his brother.

Ralph Jr. has been interviewed in print on three occasions: for the Carlson article, for Gene Plowden's *Merle Evans: Maestro of the Circus* (1971), and for Tom Killen's "The Day Clowns Cried" in the *New Haven Register* (July 4, 1989). The quotes from Ralph Jr. in O'Nan's book are combined from the two newspaper interviews.

Two quibbles with O'Nan's choice of words: the grab-trunks-to-tails command "Tail(s) up!" appears as "Tails! Tails!" and the bull hands are twice represented as "whacking" the elephants in the minutes after the fire. ("I don't remember bangin' on 'em.") Fire aside, that "busy summer" on the circus was "a fabulous thing" for "a pretty happy kid." For more on the sheer joy of being a teenager on Ringling under canvas, and for some fine insights on elephants and their keepers, see Connie Clausen's delightful memoir of the 1942 show, *I Love You Honey, But the Season's Over* (1961). And for more circus books, see Raymond Toole-Stott's *Circus and Allied Arts: A World Bibliography*, in five volumes (1958-1992).

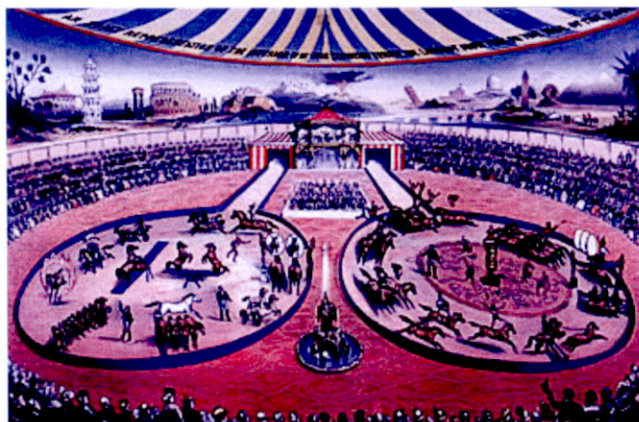
The Chicken Or The Egg: A Double Ring Controversy. Phase Two

By William L. Slout

In an earlier paper, we suggested that P. T. Barnum's Great Traveling World's Fair of 1872 did not originate the two-ring performance as they claimed in their advertising and which had been accepted as factual by later historians. The misinformation was caused by the Barnum show's use of a frequently included line: "The first and only show in the world that uses a double circus ring, and requires a double circus troupe of performers." However, the double-ring referred to the increased space between the ring and the audience, created by the use of a larger canvas pavilion to accommodate an extended seating area. This space, which formed a ring around the ring, was for circuses the origin of what we now refer to as the hippodrome track. Therefore, the true explanation for the advertisements of two rings in 1872 is that there was a new performing area around the single ring that could be used for greater spectacle."¹

This is not to be confused with Franconi's Hippodrome, which exhibited in New York City in 1853, and

An artist's drawing of a two ring circus. John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals digital collection.



then went on the road under canvas for two seasons. The Hippodrome used an elongated track within the perimeter of the seating area for races and other sports; but there was no circus ring involved. The space within the oval formed an infield decorated with landscaping. Picking up on the Franconi use, the word "hippodrome" to describe a place of exhibition or form of entertainment appeared occasionally in later circus advertising; but there is nothing to suggest from this that these organizations were anything but a standard one-ring circus.

Further, as we suggested in the previous paper, Barnum show claims for multi-ring performances during the 1873 season were valid. There were two rings and a hippodrome track, and their use was strongly advertised and frequently confirmed in local press stories. For example, the Buffalo *Daily Courier* included this description: "Under the vast Hippodrome Pavilion are three rings, one of which is used entirely for the Grand Oriental Pageant, and the others for the performances that follow. In the two rings two acts

go on simultaneously, but the salient and brilliant features of the act in one ring are so admirably timed with reference to those in the other that confusion is entirely avoided."²

From this and other such pieces of information we concluded that P. T. Barnum's Great

P. T. BARNUM'S GREAT TRAVELLING 1873 Museum, Menagerie,



WORLD'S FAIR.

Ten Times Larger than Ever!

WILL EXHIBIT IN
Salem, May 23; Gloucester, May 26; Portsmouth, May 27th

THE TWENTY COLOSSAL PAVILIONS!

Covering several Acres of Ground.

2500 Three Grand, Full, and Complete Performances of the Circus

Twenty Great Shows!

DAILY--MORNING, AFTERNOON, EVENING.

Doors open at 10 A. M., and 1 and 7 P. M.

ONE SINGLE TICKET, 50 CENTS. Admits to All.

Children under 9 years of age, half-price. Reserved Amphitheatre Seats, 75c.

Nothing Like it Ever Known on Earth.

A newspaper ad for Barnum's 1873 circus. Pfening Archives.

Traveling World's Fair was the first to make use of a double circus ring and that 1873 was the inaugural year.

But wait. There was another organization in contention for that honor: The Great Eastern Menagerie, Museum, Aviary, Circus and Balloon Show, under the management team of Andrew Haight & Co., which made its debut in 1872 out of the remains of the former Col. C. T. Ames' Menagerie, Agnes Lake's Hippo-Olympiad, and Haight's Empire City Circus. The result was a highly suc-

cessful season, made possible through exaggerated advertising and an aggressively combative policy toward all rivals. In fact, quite clearly, they were intent on forcefully competing with the Barnum show, "copy and conquer."

The Great Eastern was launched at Cincinnati's National Theatre for a week's stay on April 1, 1872. During the summer months it remained in the middle states--Kentucky, Tennessee, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin. There were a few dates in Pennsylvania and New York state in late August before starting south, as it followed a route through Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, Florida, Mississippi and Alabama, before winding up at Selma on the 13th of December, after eight months on the road.

Advertised features included the daily balloon ascension; the calliope, the only one on the road that year; the elephant Bismarck; four immense pavilions; and "twelve shows in one." However, when St. Louis was advertised for five days beginning July 22, we see for the first time the claim of "The Six Great Tent Show," not four as had previously been claimed. The ads also read, "DOUBLE CIRCUS RING. Two performances in separate pavilions at the same time, by the first talent of Europe and America." Is it possible when at this St. Louis stand the Great Eastern became the first two-ring American circus?

Following the Great Eastern's opening, the St. Louis *Democrat* favorably reported that a large crowd had filled the streets, "attracted by the gorgeous parade which was

AT GREENCASTLE, PA.
Wednesday, September, 3, 1873.
THREE FULL GRAND PERFORMANCES!
At 10 A. M. and 2 and 7 P. M.

A TOWERING GIANT AMONG ITS FELLOWS!
The Great 12 Centre Pole Tent!
AND
\$100,000 CHALLENGE SHOW!

GREAT EASTERN MENAGERIE!
Museum, Aviary, Circus, Roman Hippodrome
AND
EGYPTIAN CARAVAN!

DUAL CIRCUS EXHIBITION!
GRAND CONSTRUCTION OVER THIS RING TO TWELVE SHOWS IN ONE!

A Grand Triple Menagerie.
Grand Double Circus Performance!

EVERY ACT DOUBLE!
A Double Grand Entree!
Pageant and Procession, Over Two Miles Long!

An 1873 newspaper ad for the Great Eastern. Pfening Archives.

enlivened by three bands of music, a steam calliope, a cloud of banners, squadrons of prancing horses, and a number of wild beasts." The opening night audience was "almost uncontrollably large," according to the paper. "It surged back and forward like a great sea, rippling waves against the walls of tents, coursing irresistibly through the passage ways that connected the different apartments and drifting about in the wide hippodromes." The writer was pleased with the selection of the performers, which was confirmed by "the constant storms of applause."³

The *Democrat* of the 26th gave a final note in summary of the week's

stay. "The exhibitions have been alike profitable to the public and to the managers, the latter having reaped a harvest from the immense throngs that have been constantly in attendance. Among the many attractions during the week have been the performances of Miss Emma Lake, who has a very winning face and is an exceedingly graceful and dashing equestrienne."

However, not once did the items in the local newspapers mention two rings in separate tents giving simultaneous performances. What, then, is the explanation? The Great Eastern's chief rival, the Barnum show, was using the phrase "Six Sep-arate Colossal Tents" this year and, as we have stated, had frequently included in

its advertising: "The first and only show in the world that uses a double circus ring, and requires a double circus troupe of performers."

Therefore, our explanation for the Great Eastern claims is that, because the Barnum show followed the Great Eastern into St. Louis by a week, the Great Eastern usurped the Barnum advertisements by claiming six tents and a second ring of its own. It is true that occasionally during the remainder of the season the Great Eastern laid claims to performances in two rings within its display ads; but no local papers we surveyed referred to such an occurrence. This includes such journals as the New York *Clipper*, the Cleveland *Herald*, the Pittsburgh *Post*, the Charleston *Daily Courier*, the Augusta *Daily*

ONE WEEK ONLY!

On Lot Opposite Four Courts,
Between Eleventh and Twelfth sts., commencing

MONDAY, APRIL 14TH

2 GRAND PERFORMANCES DAILY

GREAT EASTERN!



Menagerie, Museum, Aviary, Aquarium, Circus, Roman Hippodrome and Egyptian Caravan.

FOUR GRAND MENAGERIES!

Two Colossal Museums, 2 Elaborate Aquariums, 2 Monster Hippodromes, 2 Dual Circus Troupes, in 12 Massive Pavilions, and only \$100,000 Challenge Show in the World.

GRAND STREET PAGEANT AND PROCESSION, OVER TWO MILES LONG, with Emerald, Crimson and Gold Dens, forty-one in number, three Brass and Reed Bands, Grand Steam Piano, and a full Martial Band, as in the days of '76; twenty Beautiful Women and one hundred Hecatombs and Pallas, mounted, and followed by the Cavalcade, with their flags, banners and paraphernalia—mounted Gods and Goddesses, in Oriental Costumes, with living Tigers, Lions and Panthers loose in the streets.

Before each afternoon exhibition, a Grand
FREE BALLOON ASCENSION

This Great Eastern ad appeared in the St. Louis *Daily Globe* on April 12, 1873. Author's collection.

Chronicle, the *Savannah Morning News*, the *Mobile Daily Register* and the *Atlanta Constitution*. We can only conclude that neither the Barnum show nor the Great Eastern used two rings for the season of 1872.

Yet, there is conflicting evidence we cannot adequately explain. There are two men connected with the Great Eastern in 1872 who have written briefly of their experience—George W. Hall, Jr. and John A. Dingess. Hall's article in the *Billboard* of June 24, 1922, includes absolutely nothing about a double ring; but Dingess, who was an agent for the Great Eastern during the latter part of the 1872 season, wrote in

his unpublished manuscript that DeHaven conceived the idea of the second ring. "Not two rings, wherein inferior performances were given, as is the custom nowadays, but two separate tents, with equestrian performances in each, at one and the same time."⁴ Unfortunately, that is the extent of his explanation. How could this have been accomplished? Two performances occurring in separate tents at the same time, with competing noises of band and audience? In addition, how was it done with a performing roster that was seemingly the same as at the start of the season?

During this period, many people, for whom circus performances were anathema, paid their ticket and visited only the menagerie, justifying that exhibition as educational. Could it be that the Great Eastern menagerie remained open while the arenic program was going on and that some sort of display or performing exhibition with its animals occurred? Alternatively, could it be that the side show was in constant rotation throughout the evening? This represents mere speculation as we search for an answer to conflicting information.

However, the Great Eastern did make use of a double-ring during the 1873 season. Let us take a look. With the election over, Ulysses S. Grant winning handily, the proprietors of the Great Eastern entered a new year with money in their pockets; but the management team parted ways following the successful first season, with George W. DeHaven and R. E. J. Miles joining Spencer Q. Stokes in taking out the Great Chicago Show.⁵

Emma Lake, the famous lady rider. Pfening Archives.

The early listing in the *Clipper* designated the Great Eastern's management as Haight & Co., indicating one or more others had an interest in the show. James S. Totten, the treasurer,

is one possibility. We can report, using the Great Eastern's sixteen-page 1873 *Advance Herald* as a source, that the concern was operated by Andrew Haight, general director; Jacob Haight, financial manager; Ben Maginley, manager; A. H. Penny, assistant manager; W. W. Durand, general agent; George Guilford, press agent; J. S. Totten, treasurer; J. L. Breese and Ben S. Potter, ticket agents; Col. Judd Webb, master of canvas; W. B. Carroll, equestrian director; H. J. Leech, contracting agent; Charles Sivals, advertising agent; John Johnson, animal superintendent; W. D. Storey and Jacob Muller, band leaders; Frank Moore and W. Scott, program agents; Dan Monahan, master of horse.⁶

It was announced in the early *Clipper* that the show was to travel by rail using sixty-two cars. A later count by an Indianapolis reporter was fifty-four. According to him, there were two sleeping coaches for the actors, three box cars for the working men, two for "canvassers," one for patent gas, one for properties, one for wardrobe, one for museum and refreshments, nine for the horses, and the remaining for the animals. There were two cages to a flat. The elephants were chained to a ringbolt fastened to the floor of the



car. Both elephants and camels were required to get down on their knees to enter and leave the car.⁷

Still quoting from the *Clipper*, the street parade would display forty-one dens, twenty women on horseback, a steam calliope, three full brass and reed bands and a martial band. There was to be twelve tents using three separate entrances; and, as in 1872, a double circus performance in separate pavilions. Haight & Co. shared the privileges, for the most part with men already serving in other positions. Ben Maginley and Pete Gannen had the concert; W. W. Durand and J. L. Breese, the

candy stands inside and outside; and Pat Harris, the sideshow. Herr Elijah Lengel was replaced this year by Agnes Lake, who performed as Mlle. Eugenie DeLorme; but was supported by H. Saunders, supposedly an English animal tamer. The stunt of having the various cats "loose" atop a parade wagon was continued from the 1872 season.⁸

The performing roster, many repeats from the previous year, included Emma Lake, the Carrolls--Master Willie, Marie, Annie, W. B. and Dolly Varden--C. H. Lowry, Fred Sylvester, Mlle. Ben Soiti, Adolph Barrabo, riders; Miaco Brothers, Jerome Tuttle, Tom Watson, W. Carroll, T. V. Ashton, A. P. Durand, W. Painter, W. Carr, A. Penny, F. Moore, Adolph Barrabo, Master George and Eddie, gymnasts; Ben Maginley, C. Lee Fowler, Al Miaco, clowns; John Williams, elephant performer.⁹ The Advance Herald carried the additional names of Willis Cobb and his trained dogs; the Davenport Brothers, posturers, contortionists and tumblers; Charles Spencer, acrobat and gymnast; J. C. Long, Herculean performer; Shappe & Whitney, trapeze artists; and Sam McFlynn, clown.

Andrew Haight. Pfening Archives

The claims that were broadcast were similar to those of the previous year. The Advance Herald went all out with: "\$100,000 Challenge," "Only Twelve Show Tent on Earth," "Twelve Center-Pole Show," "Double Circus Company," "Grand Street Pageant and Procession Over Two Miles Long," "Four Separate Trains Numbering 100 Cars," "20 Beautiful Young Lady Riders," "Over 2,000 Men and Horses," "A Colossal Aggregation, Reorganized and Equipped Especially for the Season of 1873."

Indeed, the company was reorganized and enlarged from the previous year. That the features of the 1872 show were grossly overstated in their advertising was confirmed in the 1873 Advance Herald. "And now,

FOUR DAYS ONLY!
IN THE RINK,
Freeman and Laurel streets.
WEDNESDAY, THURSDAY, FRIDAY, and SATURDAY, March 26, 27, 28, and 29.
GREAT EASTERN MENAGERIE,
Museum, Aviary, Aquarium, Circus, Roman Hippodrome, and Egyptian Caravan.



MENAGERIE of Wild Animals, Breathing Sea Monsters, Flesh Eating Reptiles, and Tropic Birds.
MUSEUM of Living Wonders.
GRAND DUAL CIRCUS COMPANY.
TWO PERFORMANCES DAILY!
AFTERNOON AND EVENING.
New Roof on the Rink, and other excellent improvements. Grand Procession WEDNESDAY, at 10 o'clock a. m., headed by thirty mounted police, followed by 3 Brass and Reed Bands, GRAND STEAM PIANO, Full Martial Band, 29 ladies on horseback, with attendants; 41 dens, vans, cages, and tableaux cars, with living Lions, Tigers, Panthers, and Jaguars, loose in the streets.

This Great Eastern ad appeared in the March 25, 1873 Cincinnati *Daily Gazette*. Author's collection.



kind reader, you will say we promise much, and that 'so-and-so' has 'humbugged' you in the past. We grant it; and submit to you a proposition, which, if entertained, will protect you from deception in the future. Go to our different places of appointment. Look at our procession; count the dens, the horses -- and behold the tigers, lions, leopards, elephants, camels, etc., unchained and 'loose in the streets.' Listen to the weird and bewitching music of the mammoth steam piano, drawn by its dancing teams of dapple steeds. Go to the ground where pavilions are stretched like winged things of life before you, and count them; and if you do not find everything just as we represent it, turn away and go home without patronizing us. Always judge exhibitions by this never-failing standard and you will not be deceived."

One wonders how many patrons were willing to suspend their disbelief on reading the above, as the 1873 advertising continued to make exaggerated assertions far in excess of

reality.

The salaries of the performers were included in the text of the Advance Herald, which, we are quick to note, may or may not be factual. At the very least, however, they indicate the ranking within the company. Miss Emma Lake, received \$250 per week; Mlle. Marie Elise, \$300; W. B. Carroll and family, five in number--La petite Annie, Masters Willie and Dolly Varden, and Mme. and W. B. Carroll--\$350; Charles H. Lowry, \$125; Alfred, William and Jerome Miaco, \$250; Adolph Barrabo, \$80; Tom Watson, \$60; Fred Sylvester, \$100; Jerome Tuttle, Batchelor, Norris, Storey, Wallace, Williams, Esler, and others, from \$25 to \$50; Mlle. Eugenie De Lorme (Agnes Lake), \$140.

There was a dubious beginning for the Haight organization's new season. The intention was to open in Louisville, Kentucky, on March 10 in the Exposition Building; but on the 8th an injunction was issued on behalf of James E. Cooper to prevent any circus company from performing there until Cooper's circus, which had been wintering in the building, ended its occupancy following its opening on the 31st. This forced the Great Eastern to move under canvas. All went well for the March 10 matinee, a packed house, no less. However, the evening performance was interrupted by a gale that came up around 10 p.m., snapping the center-pole in two, breaking ropes loose from the ground and collapsing the entire spread of the main canvas on top of the spectators. Pandemonium ensued, with women fainting, children screaming, and the caged animals in a nearby tent creating a spine-chilling racket. The management acted promptly in extricating the mass of humanity from beneath the flattened tent. At least two people died and untold numbers were injured, but the efforts of the circus men limited what could have been a far greater disaster. The tent was restored and re-erected the following day and no performances were lost. Haight wisely offered the entire receipts of the matinee to the sufferers.

The circus went indoors for the Cincinnati stand, four days begin-

ning March 26, at the Rink on Freeman and Laurel Streets, with two performances daily. The *Times* responded with the following assessment: "The grand zoological and arenic combination, now in the fullest tide of popular favor, had immense houses yesterday afternoon and last night at the Rink. It is estimated that over five thousand people were turned from the doors last night, unable to gain admission. This will not be wondered at when the perfection of the exhibition is remembered. No show of its kind for years has taken such hold of public favor, and none has received so liberal patronage. The animal collection is very fine, embracing many rare and heretofore unseen specimens, besides a complete list of the domestic species. The circus part of the entertainment is certainly au fait, and equestriennes, riders, posturers, tumblers, acrobats, and gymnasts each deserve special mention."¹⁰ No mention was made of a double-ring performance.

The Great Eastern spent April and May in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Michigan. There was competition early in the tour at Belleville, Illinois, and Evansville, Indiana, with another circus that sported an even longer title—the Great Trans-Atlantic Exposition, Museum, Aviary, Aquarium, Polytechnic Institute, Menagerie and Circus. The proprietors were P. A. Older and J. M. Chandler. The Great Eastern appeared at Evansville on April 12, the Trans-Atlantic arrived ahead on the 4th; the Trans-Atlantic was at Belleville on the 9th, the Great Eastern on April 14. Not unexpectedly, Older and Chambers equaled Haight & Co. in exaggerated claims of size and excellence. "Largest Show in the World!" "12 Mammoth Tents." Not to mention a museum that contained 100,000 curiosities, the only white elephant on exhibition, a monster black rhinoceros, and a troupe of 100 performers. Like the Great Eastern, the rival advertised a daily balloon ascension and, astonishingly, two rings with performances in each at the same time.

We have no record of how the two shows fared at Evansville and Belleville; certainly, the Great

Eastern had the stronger company. We mention the confrontation to show how occasionally Haight and associates received a taste of their own medicine.

The Great Eastern spent a week in St. Louis beginning April 15 on a lot between Eleventh and Twelfth Streets, opposite Four Courts, where more accolades were handed out. "No institution of its character has achieved more deserved popularity in this city than the really colossal Great Eastern, and, considering the very unpropitious state of the weather the last three days, none have received a more liberal patronage. Perfect in all its several departments, elegant in all its appointments, and elaborate in every detail, it justly and properly ranks among the first mammoth combinations of the entire world. . . . The circus part of the entertainment comprises the creme de la creme of the circle."¹¹ Still no indication of a double-ring.



A Great Eastern lithograph of Mlle M. Carroll. John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals digital collection.

The circus missed a performance at Indianapolis on April 9, arriving too late for the evening show. An accident along the route from Connersville was the cause of the delay. About 6 a.m. the train pulled into Union Station, and then continued on to the vicinity of the old circus grounds at West Georgia Street. Performances were given there the following day. "Ben Maginley, the veteran circus manager, is in charge of the establishment this season," the *Journal* of the 10th read, "and his name is guaranty that everything is

the best of its kind to be had."

Keokuk, Iowa, was visited a full month ahead of the Trans-Atlantic. The *Daily Gate City* reported good attendance at the circus on April 21, in spite of the questionable spring weather and bad roads. "Since its appearance here last year the Great Eastern's proportions have been largely augmented and it is now one of the most gigantic institutions ever organized in this country. The street procession yesterday morning surpassed anything of the kind ever seen in Keokuk. . . . The Great Eastern is a modern triumph in the show line, and is entitled to a position in the very front ranks of the big institutions of the present day."¹² What about a double-ring?

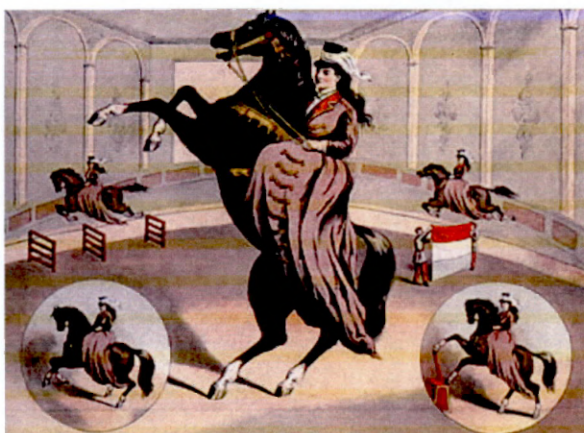
From a stop at Peoria on April 28, a *Clipper* correspondent estimated that the spread of canvas was greater and covered more ground than any previous circus that had visited the city. The twelve tents were lighted by self-generating gas. The street parade had one martial and two brass bands, all under the leadership of Prof. W. D. Storey. The performance orchestra numbered twenty-five. The menagerie had forty-four cages. A side show consisted of a Punch and Judy, two cages of animals, an albino boy, a four-footed child and magician Prof.

Collier. Ring stand-outs worthy of mention by our writer were Charles Lee Fowler, "one of the most perfect we have ever seen in the ring, his jokes and gags are new, and done with a nicety that at once commands the respect and applause of all;" fellow clown, Sam McFlynn, "also a very clever performer, and with more experience will make a first-rate artist;" and "Dolly Varden, son of Mr. W. B. Carroll, and to all appearances three years old" (Varden was Carroll's ward, not his son, and was a dwarf, not an infant).¹³ However, there was nothing so far to confirm a double-ring performance.

Competition was heating up in May, which included an altercation between the Great Eastern's man,

Atkinson, and Robert Dingess, agent for Forepaugh, at the St. Joseph Hotel in South Bend, Indiana. Bitter words between them reportedly led to Dingess being struck by Atkinson, who then pulled out a revolver. Bystanders quickly interfered, after which the Great Eastern representative was whisked off to jail. Bail was set at \$500. But with Dingess fleeing town on an early morning train, Atkinson was released.

The circus moved into Michigan for several dates. At Jackson on the 13th, the *Daily Citizen* writer established his proficiency in arithmetic. We include it in its entirety because of its unvarnished view of the goings-on. "For many days the populace of central Michigan have waited for the event of what was advertised as 'The Great Eastern Menagerie, Museum, Aviary, Circus, Roman Hippodrome, Egyptian Caravan and Balloon Show.' The huge advertisement in the newspapers and the large bills explaining the magnificence of the concern served to call out quite a large number of people. It was proclaimed that 100 railroad cars and four locomotives were used to transport this show, which was termed 'A Grant Among Its Fellows.' The populace was a little taken back when they saw forty-one cars brought the Great Eastern to town. The street procession was stated to be two miles long, composed of cages, 100 horsemen, four bands, etc. The male and female persons on horseback numbered twenty people, with twenty-six cages and wagons, one small elephant, whose blanket had the gilded name of 'Conqueror' inscribed thereon. There were three bands, the first composed of eight pieces, the next of eight pieces, and the martial band of six pieces. There were two camels in the procession, and one cage had a tiger and a couple of panthers on the roof. After the procession had peregrinated through the streets, the people went to look for the twelve tents. They could discover but four tents and a sideshow tent. No one could find the forty-one dens of wild beasts, but there were eighteen, filled with birds, monkeys, lions and a few rare



A lithograph of Emma Lake. John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals digital collection.

animals. We looked all over for the breathing sea monster, but he had ceased to breathe and was out of sight. The 'steam piano' brought up the rear of the procession, but it provoked merriment instead of wonder. It was not visible after the parade. It was quite a burlesque in its line, and should be kept out of sight after being once seen. The great museum could not be found, without it was a sideshow of small dimensions. The forty-four feet of snakes were not seen, and the menagerie did not contain a quarter of the animals advertised. The 'Aviary' had dried up and didn't bloom here. The circus performance was very good, and a redeeming feature of the whole 'Great Eastern.' The two rings were a novelty. The people had been led to expect a leviathan concern, but the show does not possess many more attractions than less pretentious organizations. It received a liberal patronage, but did not satisfy the people, whose expectations had been wrought up to the highest pitch by the great announcements. In fact, a great many people went home with the thought that they had been considerably humbugged and thought the 'Great Eastern' was a fraud in many points. The thousands who had come to town were disappointed and chagrined. If the show had made less pretensions, and less claim to being a monster organization, it would not have been so bad, but people were led to believe that it would be the biggest thing that ever came here, and in this they were much disappointed.

They would have been content if the half promised had been carried out, but it was not. The 'Great Eastern' will have to add much to its attractions, before it can come up to its pretensions."¹⁴ Ahhah! "The two rings were a novelty."

More squabbles occurred on May 26 at Detroit. Letters had appeared in the press, supposedly from citizens, condemning the Great Eastern as an imposter. W. W. Durand took umbrage at the inserts and sued Barnum's agent, William McLaughlin, and Forepaugh's agent, John Dingess, for libel; and the two men were consigned to the lockup. McLaughlin was released on the 28th; Dingress experienced a longer confinement. In retaliation, the latter man charged Jacob Haight with libel and had him arrested. J. M. French and Fred B. Hooper put up security for Haight and he was released.

Most of June was occupied in Canada and New York state.¹⁵ Buffalo was visited for two days, June 12 and 13, setting up on a Main Street lot, between Tupper and Goodell. The procession drew a large crowd; after which, Prof. Reno ascended in his balloon inflated with air from an alcohol fire. The afternoon performance was well attended and at night, "the very large canvas was packed to the utmost capacity." The man from the *Courier* complimented the management for the smooth and rapid change from one act to another, and found the carrying act of W. B. Carroll and his boy, Dolly Varden, praiseworthy.¹⁶

Advertisements for Buffalo promised "two sets of performers, giving double acts in separated rings under one canvas at the same time." In a post-appearance item, the *Courier* confirmed this with "the arena is divided into two rings, in which two separate performances go on simultaneously, so that the audience is kept on alert from beginning to end."¹⁷

July and August were spent in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. The date at Easton, Pennsylvania, on July 22 prompted the *Daily Express* to include a eulogy to Mlle. Marie

Elise (Marie Carroll, adopted daughter of Barney Carroll). "An Artiste.-Mlle. Marie Elise, the leading equestrienne of the Great Eastern Consolidation, fully bears out her reputation as one of the best lady riders in the country. Her skill, style and graceful horsemanship proclaim her 'to the manner born,' and that a life spent in the ring will win honor and fame for the hard-working and accomplished artiste. Her feats, however difficult, are easily and beautifully done, and many of them appear simple from the easy grace from which they are performed. One of Mlle's most noted acts is leaping through a hoop so small that it will scarcely pass over her skirts and from the back of a horse in rapid motion. She has certainly reached a high point in her profession, and may feel that she has well earned her laurels."¹⁸

The circus arrived at the commons near the Lancaster Manufacturing Company's Works on Sunday, August 24, where it was greeted with a crowd of about a thousand bystanders to witness the set up. The following day, circus day, the numbers increased by four to five thousand. The *Lancaster Daily Evening Express* acknowledged the balloon ascension to be the best feature of the event, performed by "an intrepid young aeronaut, a mere boy," who landed safely at some point behind the Wetzel farm near the county hospital. The paper also reported the presence of a number of pickpockets, who were apparently operating with some success and perhaps immunity.

In the evening, shortly before the ring performance began, the canvas caught fire, ignited by sparks from the steam calliope. "There was no water at hand, but plenty of lemonade, and 'circus lemonade' being the nearest approach to muddy water that we know of, we cannot deplore its use for putting out the flames." Thereby, a catastrophe was averted, leaving the damage to a mere hole some seven feet in diameter. "Altogether, we do not know that the circus benefited us much as a community. We are certain of one thing-it took between \$2,000 and \$3,000 of the hard earnings of our middle and poorer classes out of the city, leaving

nothing in exchange but the recollections of a heated tent, tame equestrianism, stale and vulgar jokes, and on many instances sore heads and terribly depleted pocket books-if indeed, the pocket book was permitted to remain at all."¹⁹

The circus started south in September. An accident occurred on the 7th while the two show trains were en route from Westminster to Baltimore on the Western Maryland Railroad. A landslide caused two of the cars--one a sleeper and passenger car, the other a freight car-to jump the track. The latter, containing the



small elephant, a camel and a buffalo, turned over. The animals were not hurt and three of the passengers were only slightly injured. After being delayed four hours, the trains arrived at their destination.

The *American and Commercial Advertiser* greeted the first day of Baltimore's three-day stand--September 8, 9, 10--with satisfaction: "There was an immense throng at the circus last night, but the accommodations of the mammoth pavilion are so excellent that all were comfortably seated. Everything was on a colossal scale. . . . The menagerie is divided into three sections, each of which occupies a pavilion. By this arrangement the animals can be seen at leisure, and there is never so great a crowd around the cages as to obstruct the view." The trained horses and the trapeze performers attracted special attention from the writer.²⁰

Washington, D. C. was visited on the 12th and 13th to large attendance, where Gen. W. T. Sherman and family enjoyed the second night performance. A correspondent reported that two ring performances were given simultaneously. The tra-

peze act of Shappee, Whitney and the Miaco Brothers, the feats of horsemanship by the Carroll children, and the trained horses presented by Emma Lake and W. B. Carroll were considered the features of the show.²¹

The *Republican* reported that W. W. Durand (now called Major Durand, having served in the Confederate army) was presented some weeks prior to the show's arrival with a gift from his colleagues, a set of gold studs, sleeve and collar buttons, as a mark esteem. They were manufactured by Galt Brothers of Washington, and cost \$80.

Richmond was a battleground. There was an encounter with from L. B. Lent's New York Circus in Lent's first southern tour under that name. The Great Eastern preceded the New York Circus by showing on September 24 and 25 on the corner of Second and Leigh Streets, ahead of Lent's, which set up on the same lot for the 29th and 30th. At Raleigh, North Carolina, where the Great Eastern performed in Baptist Grove on October 3, the New York Circus arrived a week later on the 10th with the usual "Wait for the Big Show," and stole the Barnum thunder with the proclamation: "Greatest Show on Earth." Lack of newspaper reaction leaves us in the dark as to who was the winner on either occasion.

Three performances were advertised for the Augusta, Georgia, stand on October 27, at 10 a.m., 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. The *Daily Chronicle and Sentinel* proclaimed that the stretch of canvas was the largest ever seen before. It was literally packed on opening night. "The performance took place in two rings and was excellent in every particular. The bareback riding was especially fine, and we do not think can be surpassed. The trained horses are among the best that have ever been brought to this city." At the evening performance, Major W. W. Durand again was called forth and presented with a gift, this time a gold watch and chain and gold-headed cane, purchased at the local establishment of F. A. Braho & Co. The newspaper also lauded the proficiency of the man behind the ticket window. "Among the many wonders of the Great

Eastern is one not mentioned on the bills, but a feature nevertheless, most noticeable. Mr. George W. Zebold, properly termed the champion ticket seller, was the observed of all observers last night upon the Parade Ground. The readiness with which he handles the currency is not only remarkable, but also astonishing. It matters not what the denomination—a one, a five, ten, twenty or fifty—there's your ticket and your change, quick, as thought, round and correct. The way the bank folks look upon Mr. Zebold would indicate that he might profitably change his business."²²

Two days in Atlanta—December 2 and 3—at the site of the Georgia Western Railroad depot on Marietta Street, closed the season. The Constitution noted that the opening night attendance was "witnessed by the largest concourse of people we ever saw under canvas in this city." Furthermore, "The immensity of the exhibition and the variety of entertainments seemed to be an agreeable surprise to everybody, and we heard no word spoken save of praise and commendation."²³ The Great Eastern had survived the great Panic of 1873.

In summary, as we have shown, the Great Eastern made use of a double-ring during the 1873 season. However, no local confirmation of its use prior to the month of June was found, leaving us to speculate it was added two months into the season as an emulation of the Barnum show, bolstering the Great Eastern claim of "Double Circus Company" and "A Colossal Aggregation, Reorganized and Equipped Especially for the Season of 1873." We found no indication of a double-ring in April appearances at Louisville, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Indianapolis and Keokuk, Iowa. The first real acknowledgment came from an account in the Jackson, Michigan, *Daily Citizen* of May 14 with: "The two rings were a novelty." In June, advertisements for Buffalo promised "two sets of performers, giving double acts in separated rings under one canvas at the same time." In a post-appearance item, the Buffalo *Courier* verified this with "the arena is divided into two rings, in which two separate performances go on simultaneously, so

that the audience is kept on alert from beginning to end." "But once the second ring was added, it appears to have been used throughout the remainder of the season. For example, the *American and Commercial Advertiser* greeted the first day of Baltimore's three-day stand—September 8, 9, 10—with: "There are two rings; both in full view of the whole audience, and the performance in each one would constitute a splendid exhibit in itself." Washington, D. C. followed on September 12 and 13, where a *Clipper* correspondent, writing on the 14th, stated: "In the circus pavilion two ring performances are given simultaneously." An advertisement for an appearance of the circus at Charleston, South Carolina, for October 20 included "Every act doubles in two rings at the same hour under one grand pavilion." The Augusta, Georgia, *Daily Chronicle and Sentinel* of October 28 reported: "The performance took place in two rings and was excellent in every particular."

Both the Barnum show and the Great Eastern originated double-ring performances for the season of 1873, one or the other being the first to offer them, if only by the "length of a nose." The Great Eastern opened the season at Louisville on March 10. The Barnum show opened at the former Empire Rink in New York City, now called the American Institute, on March 29 for two weeks, half a month later than the Great Eastern; and from a description in the New York *Times* of April 4, we know there were performances in two rings simultaneously. Consequently, until better information is uncovered, we have to congratulate the Greatest Show on Earth for being the first to exhibit as a double-ring circus.

Notes

1. William L. Slout, "Two Rings and a Hippodrome Track," *Bandwagon*, November-December, 2000.
2. Buffalo (NY) *Daily Courier*, July 2, 1873.
3. St. Louis (MO) *Democrat*, July 23, 1872.
4. Dingess includes a reproduction of an ad from a Pensacola, Florida, paper dated October 19, 1872, and

ending with the customary identification, "John A. Dingess, agent."

5. At the opening of the season, Stokes was listed as sole proprietor of the Great Chicago. DeHaven was general manager and Miles the business manager and treasurer; but the latter two must have had an interest in the concern at the outset as well. From the *Clipper's* listing, the wagon show carried twelve tents—one 150' by 200,' one 100' round, and ten 80,' rounds; sixteen cages, a small museum, and a sixteen piece orchestra. The arenic performance was built around the great James Robinson, supported by the Stokes family, the Royal Yedo Japanese Troupe, twenty-four children riders, William Gorman, clowns Sam Stickney, William Burke, etc. There would be a rocky road ahead.

6. Great Eastern Advance Herald, 1873.

7. Indianapolis (IN) *Sentinel*, April 10, 1873.

8. New York *Clipper* supplement, April 19, 1873.

9. *Ibid.*

10. Cincinnati (OH) *Times*, as repeated in the Keokuk (IA) *Daily Gate City*, April 16, 1873.

11. St. Louis, (MO) *Daily Globe*, April 17, 1873.

12. Keokuk, (IA) *Daily Gate City*, April 22, 1873.

13. New York *Clipper*, May 10, 1873.

14. Jackson (MI) *Daily Citizen*, May 14, 1873.

15. While in London, Ontario, Ben Maginley received word of the death of his little daughter in Lansing, MI., for which he immediately left.

16. Buffalo (NY) *Courier*, June 13, 1873, reprinted in the Ft. Scott (KS) *Daily Monitor*, March 25, 1874.

17. *Ibid.*

18. Reprinted in the New York *Clipper*, August 30, 1873.

19. Lancaster (PA) *Daily Evening Express*, August 26, 1873.

20. Baltimore (MD) *American and Commercial Advertiser*, September 9, 1873.

21. New York *Clipper*, September 20, 1873.

22. Augusta (GA) *Daily Chronicle and Sentinel*, October 28, 1873.

23. Atlanta (GA) *Constitution*, December 3, 1873.

Jumping Horses, Automobiles and Circuses

BY SYLVESTER BRAUN

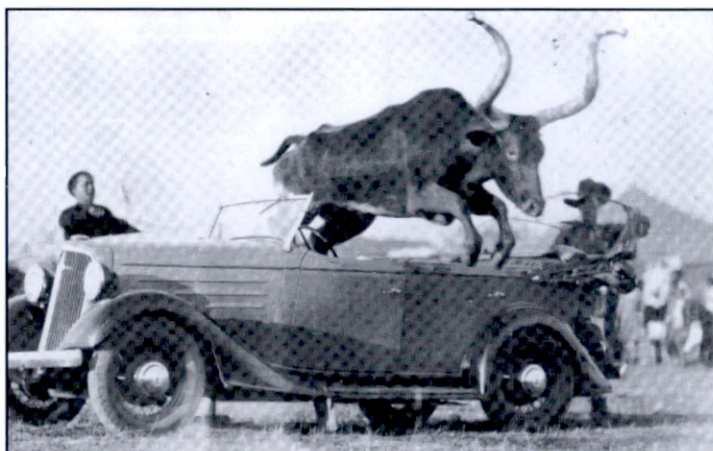
In my early years, the 1930s, as a young rodeo trick roper, I became fascinated with horses, longhorn steers, Brahma bulls and Roman riders who jumped over topless automobiles. I grew up in Southern California and I saw two of the most photographed auto jumping acts. The first was Bonnie Gray and her tall palomino King Tut who jumped over a top-down touring car with four passengers sitting in it. The other was the unforgettable longhorn steer Bobby, owned and trained by Montie Reger, jumping over various automobiles.

I began collecting magazines, newspaper clippings and photos of car jumpers with plans to write an article on it for a horse-oriented or Western magazine. I thought some enterprising specialty-act cowboy invented this entertaining act. Information on who was first to use

Unknown jumper on the Gollmar Bros. Circus midway in 1925 over a 1925 Ford Model T. Tim Tegge collection.

an automobile as a horse-jumping hurdle was limited, so I could only guess who was the originator of this jump. Then I discovered an article in the July-August

2000 *Bandwagon* that stated Rhoda Royal, the great equestrian director and horse trainer, had a jumping horse named Jumping Jupiter on the 1916 Sells-Floto Circus. To quote the story: "An automobile faces the horse filled with people, one look, a leap and Jumping Jupiter, the champion auto hurdling horse of the world has cleared the obstacle and is trotting down the hippodrome track while you . . . will cheer him and applaud-

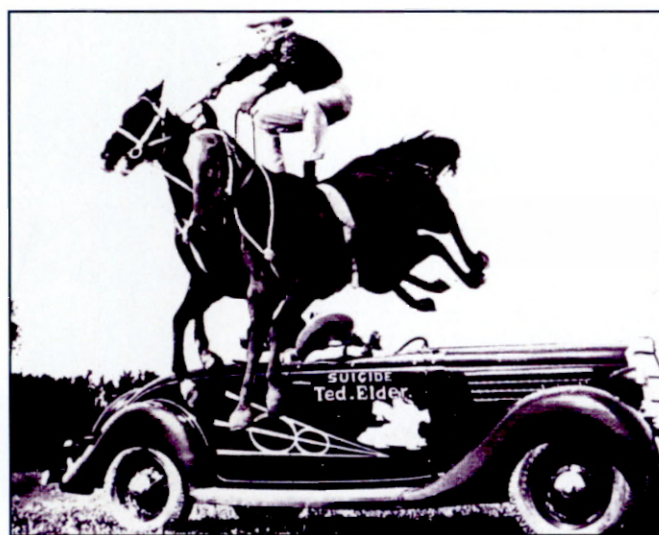


Monte Reger's long horned steer. Author's collection.

him. You can't help it." Thus, a circus trainer came up with the idea of a new hurdle for jumping horses.

For years, Wild West shows were popular concerts or after shows for

Suicide Ted Elder in the midst of a Roman standing jump on Cole Bos. in 1935. G. Peer collection.





Ralph Clark on Ted Elder's team of horses on the J. E. Ranch rodeo in 1937. This photo appeared in the 1938 Ringling-Barnum program when Clark's act was on the show. Author's collection.

jumping acts as a feature attraction.

The 1933 Allen Bros. Wild West Circus, owned by M. H. Allen, featured a car-jumping horse in its concert. In 1936 Maynard Bros. Circus went broke and stranded a wild west cowboy named Hamm who owned a black and white Pinto that jumped over a Hudson automobile.

I was given a photo of an English style rider jumping over a topless 1925 Ford Model T in front of the Gollmar Bros. Circus sideshow's banner line. The rider is not identified, but after more research I concluded it was the 1925 Chester Monahan Gollmar Circus that used equipment leased from Jerry Mugivan. Ray Thompson, another great circus horse trainer, had horses on this show, suggesting that this was a Thompson-trained jumping horse and rider.

A video entitled *Ringling Bros. Super Collection*, sold by Jim Ridenour, includes a clip of a Ringling horse trainer schooling a horse over a high hurdle. The following scene shows the horse making two jumps over a top-down Model T Ford, probably a 1920s model. The first is over the passenger side of the car without anyone sitting in it. In the second, people are seated in the car while the horse jumps over the engine hood. Unfortunately, the horse and trainer

are both unidentified.

Al Mann was another high jumping horse rider on Ringling, using Joe Greer-trained horses. Mann's biography mentions jumping different horses over a variety of autos and pick up trucks. Mann also related that in 1925 Dexter Fellows, the great Ringling-Barnum press agent, set up a Pathe Newsreel promotion in New York's Central Park in which Al did a

Roman standing jump over a car and another jump on King Cole, a Joe Greer horse, over another vehicle. I would love to see this newsreel if it still exists.

In 1935 the Cole Bros. Circus, in its first season, hired "Suicide Ted" Elder to do his exciting Roman standing jump over a Ford to end each performance. Elder originated the Roman standing jump over a car a few years earlier on the 101 Ranch Wild West. Several other riders claimed they had done the Roman standing jump before Elder, but he is usually acknowledged to be the first.

The Ringling-Barnum Circus contacted Ralph Clark in 1938 to do a

The great Alice Sisty, "the Mexico City Cowgirl," Roman jumps over a car in this postcard. Author's collection.



Roman standing jump over an auto to conclude the performance. Ringling personnel had apparently seen the success of this act on other shows. His act was considered good enough that after the Ringling show closed in Scranton, Pennsylvania in late June, he, along with Ringling's top performers, was sent to the Al G. Barnes-Sells Floto show to augment its program. Clark had experience doing the auto jump before he came to Ringling, having filled in for Ted Elder on Cole Bros. when Elder was injured.

In the 1950s my wife and I performed on several horse-oriented fair shows. In 1954 and 1955 we were with Buck Steele's Frontier Days show, playing Midwestern and Eastern fairs. Steele had some good jumping horses including a big thoroughbred that jumped a car every day. Maude Moore Adams was the rider, and she was excellent, a very good all-around wild west performer.

Several other wild west fair units had car jumpers. In 1953, when we were on Rex Rossi's South of the Border Fiesta, we would see the 105 Ranch Wild West Rodeo, which wintered in Missouri. It had a good liberty car jumper named Brown Bomber that went over a Cadillac. I was later told that Annabelle Pogeman, jumped this same horse over an auto using an old-style lady's sidesaddle.

What type and make of automobile was used as a hurdle? Almost any make of touring car that could lower the top would do, Pierce Arrow, Essex, Nash, Oldsmobile, and Hudson. The most popular in the early years was the Ford Model T. A few years later the Ford Model A became the car of choice for auto jumpers. Later, long, low convertibles were used, Buicks, Packard's, Chevrolets and Cadillacs. Alice Sisty, the best known and most photographed female auto jumper, did it over a white Cord convertible. She did mostly rodeo and wild west, and probably a few promoted circuses. If a convertible was not available the jumps were made over the engine hood of older sedans. These, then, are the auto jumpers I know of with circus or wild west show connections. There are probably others of which I have no knowledge.

Bill Woodcock's Circus Album

The cage in our first photograph is buried up to the wheel hub. It shows how brawny the Al. G. Barnes Circus elephants were; they were something like people who work out today. After the Barnes show was taken off the road, these elephants were absorbed into the Ringling-Barnum herd, and the differences between the Barnes and Ringling elephants was remarkable. Six of the elephants' weight exceed 10,000 pounds



with the largest coming from the Barnes show, Babe, Jewel, Joskey, and Trilby.

The next shot is the Ringling show in 1930 and these two young elephants Minnie and Dolly are growing up in ignorance. All they did was walk in spec wearing these clown suits. Here they are waiting at the back door and are so unreliable that you will notice they have to be chained for this just for this short period of time.

After the 1933 season they were moved over to the Barnes show, also owned by the Ringling organization, and many years later Slivers Madison told me that by this time they were pretty big and very ill mannered. In his own words: "They didn't even know how to crap in the ring."

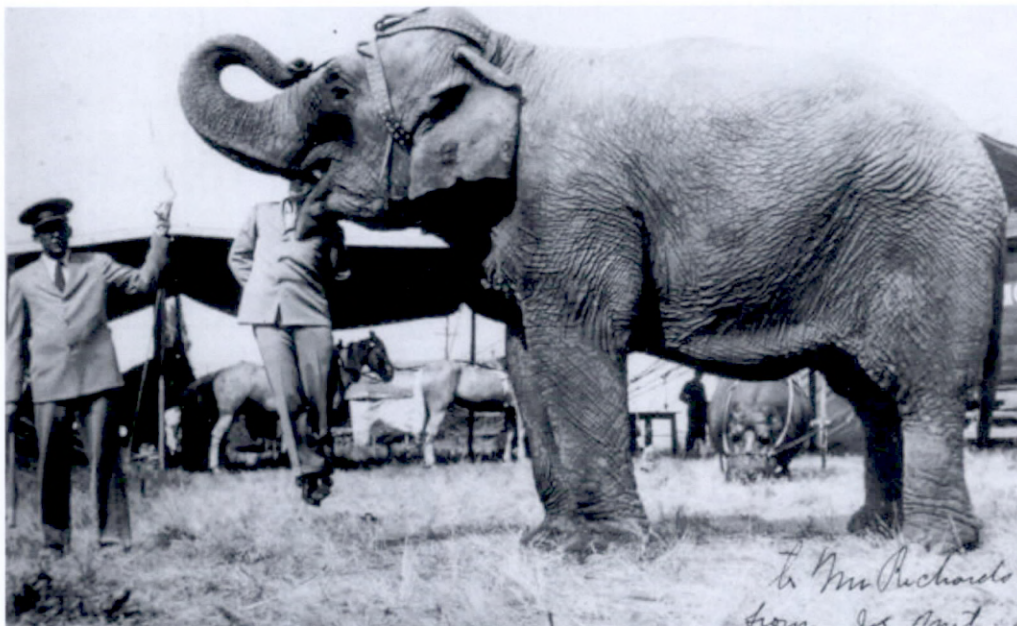
The third picture is of Big Ruth on the Barnes show. She is hold Alonzo Dever in her mouth as Joe Metcalfe styles for the camera. She was Al G. Barnes's first elephant in 1910 and she continued with the Barnes show through 1938. In 1939 she was trans-

ferred to the Ringling-Barnum Circus where she trouped through 1956. She remained in Ringling's Sarasota, Florida winter quarters in 1957 when the circus was cut way down, becoming a ball park show with far fewer elephants than in previous years. In 1958 she was sold to Eddie Billetti for his shopping center circus. In 1966 Billetti sold to a party in Puerto Rico where I lose track of her.

In his book *Circus Doctor*, J Y

Henderson described Ruth as the "herd leader." This is deceptive. She never led the herd anywhere, but more accurately would be considered the most reliable. She was the elephant that could be sent out alone to do things and you knew there would be no problems. As an example, on the Ringling show she would dig furrows around the lot with a farm plow to bury light cables. Although she wasn't real big, most of the other elephants were afraid of her for some





reason which came in handy in case one of them would decide to act up, and she was also a steadying influence on young elephants in training.

She was very clever. I was fascinated when I saw one of the men throw his bull hook on the ground in front of her. She promptly picked it up and manipulated it until she had a grip

on the handle and proceeded to scratch herself with the hook, first behind the ears then between her front legs, and finally she lifted her head high so she could scratch under her chin during which time she screwed up her face like a dog does when being scratched.

I might add that she was promi-



nent in the Tarazan movies in which the Barnes elephants appeared. I recall one scene in which she carries a man to safety, supposedly Tarzan, by the leg in this fashion.

Our last shot is of Peggy MacDonald with Opal on the Polack Bros. Circus in 1954. Peggy's husband Mack trained Opal and many other elephants. In one of my dad's letters he wrote: "The best elephant trainers today are Mack MacDonald and Hugo Schmidt and the rest are a pretty sorry lot."

Mack trained Opal to walk a tightrope, about ten or twelve feet long. Two 10" channel irons were fitted into the slots on the top of the pedestals, then Opal would walk across on her hind legs then drop her trunk down between the rails and return on her front legs.

The act was called the Besalou elephants after the owners of the show, Bessie Polack and Louie Stern. It had six elephants in it, Mary, Jean, Betty, Millie, Kathy and Opal. I don't recall who the first two elephants were named after, but the last four were named for Betty Bell, Millie Ward, Kathy Goebel, and Opal Page. Bell and Ward were flyers on the show, Goebel was the wife of Louie Goebel who ran the Jungleland animal park in Thousand Oaks, California, and Page ran the Polack office in Chicago. I had the privilege of working this act after Mack retired, and they were terrific.

Louie was my favorite boss. I never met Irving J. Polack or his wife Bessie, both had died by the time I joined the show in 1965, but I was told that Louie was always "the Man." He had a poor memory for names and addressed everyone as "Kid," and referred to me as the "Elephant Guy," the local Potentate as the "Shrine Guy," etc. The only person he called by name was Parley Baer who he called "Polly." Parley compared Stern to Samuel Goldwyn because they both were great in mangling the English language. I often think of Louie. I liked him a lot.

Side Lights On The Circus Business

PART FORTY NINE

By David W. Watt

Editor's note. The dates listed are the dates the article appeared in the Janesville, Wisconsin Daily Gazette.

December 8, 1919

As I have told you before, it was in 1864 that Adam Forepaugh came to Delavan and bought the Mabie show and after shipping it to Philadelphia where he already had established winter quarters, it was then that he commenced looking around for men to remodel the show. It was to start out much larger and most of it new.

He hired two brothers by the name of Taylor, Ed and Dan, who, while young men, were both high class wagon makers. They were appointed the bosses to remodel the show which was to take the road the following spring. When it was finally organized, Dan, the older, was made boss canvasman and Ed was appointed to look after the repairs of the show. At

that time it was a large wagon show, and on account of bad roads in those days, breaks were many and Ed was obliged to hire a helper to keep the wagons and cages in repair.

This was the beginning of the Taylor brothers in show business which proved to be their life work. After the death of Adam Forepaugh and the sale of the shows to James A. Bailey and James E. Cooper of the Barnum show both Taylors followed the show and the last time the Barnum & Bailey show was in Janesville under Mr. Bailey's management, both Taylor brothers were here. At that time Dan Taylor told me while visiting with him that he would be 82 years old his next birthday. Ed who is two years younger, said they had never missed a season since starting out in the spring of '65.

Dan, the older of the brothers, died a couple of years later. The brother, Ed died four years later. Both brothers often spoke of their good health and attributed it largely to their outdoor work and plain living.

In '78 the show crossed the plains to California and wintered at Oakland where both of the Taylor boys put in the winter putting the show in shape for the coming summer. After showing a few towns in California, the show started back for the east only making four stands between San Francisco and Fremont, Nebraska. One run of something like 650 miles was made without unloading the stock. When the show arrived in Fremont several performers joined the show there for the balance of the season. This being its first season by rail, it was considered by the people with the show a pleasure trip compared with traveling by wagon. The

Barnum show first took to rail in '77 [1872] and the Forepaugh show the following year [1878].

This season Mr. Forepaugh often spoke of as being one of his banner seasons in the business.

Finney in New Orleans

C. W. Finney, general contracting agent for the Sells-Floto circus past season and for the past six years with Edward Arlington as assistant, is located at New Orleans for the winter. Mr. Finney finished his duties at New Orleans and without any loss of time joined the forces of the Select Picture Corporation, as special exploitation representative with headquarters in New Orleans and Dallas. A banquet was tendered Mr. Finney at the St. Charles Hotel. Among the speakers of the evening were H. B. Gentry, general manager of the Sells-Floto circus, Otto Floto of Kansas City and Denver, one of the owners, who was spending a few days with the show, Jack Dempsey, the world's champion fighter; Edward Arlington, general traffic director, W. E. Wells, equestrian director; Frank Braden, press representative and others from the show who were glad to be present to wish Mr. Finney success in his new work. He promised that he would be back on the lots again next spring.

Clinton W. Finney



Joe Lewis

Tumbled in Auto Wreck

Joe Lewis, known as the "David Warfield of circus clowns," wants to inform his friends that he took a tumble in an auto wreck, the driver losing control while rounding a curve at high speed, and the car turning turtle which resulted in his lying in the hospital a week with a gash in his right leg below the knee, requir-

ing six stitches. Lewis says he has taken many falls with circuses, was kicked in the mouth by a bucking mule and rolled over precipices in the movies and didn't call it being hurt, but to think that he should meet his Waterloo in a flivver gets on his nerves. He adds that he will be in the movies the coming season and leaves Columbus, Nebraska for California at an early date.

December 13, 1919

As all of the shows are in their winter quarters, a few notes of their whereabouts and where they will spend the winter I hope may prove interesting reading. The great Ringling and Barnum & Bailey shows are in their winter quarters at Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The *Billboard* gives the following account of the wedding of Miss May Wirth to a performer with the show by the name of Frank White:

May Wirth Weds

New York, November 29-May Wirth, the celebrated rider of the famous Wirth family, was married to Frank White, circus man at the Little Church Around the Corner Thanksgiving day. For years he performed as a clown and in other capacities under the same canvas as Miss Wirth.

Miss Wirth has been with the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey circuses for several years and was the star of the show for the past two years. John, Charles and Bob Ringling came from their Florida estate to attend the wedding. "Poodles" Hanneford was best man and his sister, Elizabeth, bridesmaid. John Ringling gave the bride away.

After the ceremony, which was attended by more than one hundred well-known circus and stage folks, the couple gave a luncheon in the College Room of the Hotel Astor. In the center of the table was a large wedding cake, mounted on which was a pure white miniature horse made of hard frosting. Among those present were the Ringlings, Mrs. Martin Wirth, Lew Graham and Mr. and Mrs. Fred Worrell.

In New Quarters at Phoenix

Al G. Barnes circus on November 15 at Phoenix, Arizona closed one of

the most prosperous seasons in its history. The Chamber of Commerce of Phoenix persuaded Mr. Barnes to winter his big circus there, offering him the state fairgrounds. All the fair buildings, grounds and tracks are at the disposal of Mr. Barnes and his entire circus will be rebuilt at Phoenix instead of at Venice, California where the show has wintered for several years.

Mr. Barnes will build a motion picture studio and start a company at once to make a wild animal feature. Mr. Barnes will produce a picture that is new and novel. All of the circus employees were kept at Phoenix for this occasion.



Mr. and Mrs. Tom Thumb

Mrs. Tom Thumb Dies

Middleboro, Massachusetts. November 29--Countess Primo Magri, known to the general public as Mrs. Tom Thumb, and one of the best known Lilliputians in the world, died at her home here Tuesday after a long illness. She was 77 years of age and had traveled around the world several times under the management of the late P. T. Barnum. She was the daughter of James S. and Hilda Bump and of Revolutionary stock. Count Magri, her husband, survives.

Mrs. Thumb was born in Middleboro, Massachusetts in 1842. Until the age of one year she developed normally. When ten years of age her body ceased to grow, though her mind developed in a perfectly normal manner. She made her first appearance

when 17 years old. In 1863 she married General Tom Thumb and traveled throughout the world with him until his death in 1883. Two years later she married the count Primo Magri, also a dwarf, who had traveled in her company. Mrs. Thumb at no time in her career weighed more than 20 pounds and was 32 inches in height.

The body has been taken to Bridgeport, Connecticut for burial beside that of Mrs. Thumb's first husband, Charles Butler [Stratton], known to the world as "General Tom Thumb."

Sacks Sails for England

New York, November 29--J. L. Sacks, Ltd. of London, sailed for England today on the S. S. *Mauritania*. Mr. Sacks was over here for several weeks in the interest of the English syndicate who proposed to purchase a circus for that country. As to the success of his mission, no information has been forthcoming to date. It is understood, however, that he did purchase rights to some of the theatrical successes and that he made arrangements to bring to his country "Shanghai," a spectacle similar to "Chu Chin Chow," which is now running in London.

Arlington on Broadway

New York, November 29--Edward Arlington, general agent of the Sells-Floto circus, called at the office of the *Billboard* today. He declined to name the features to be seen with the Denver organization season 1920, but made it plain that when they are announced they will fully substantiate the recent announcement that the Sells-Floto organization is really enlarging and that in the future will become an important factor in the circus world.

George Hall Circus

The only circus that Wisconsin can boast of will winter at Hot Springs, Arkansas. It is Col. George W. Hall's, Evansville.

Col. George W. Hall circus is now in winter quarters at North Little Rock, Arkansas and will start out in the spring somewhat larger. Frank Hall and wife are now spending a few

weeks in Hot Springs but will return to Little Rock in December in time to put on an indoor circus for a local dry goods company. William Campbell will have his ponies, dogs, bears, camel, llama, baby elephant and monkeys in the store starting December 18. He and Mrs. Campbell and Mrs. Hall are living in their new home in North Little Rock.

December 29, 1919

A few days ago I received a clipping from a Brooklyn paper telling of the death of the big white horse belonging to the famous Dutton troupe. I have known the Dutton family for years and have seen their act many times, which has for years been one of the high class acts with the circus and also with the vaudeville houses during the winter.

I received the following concerning the horse:

One of the Brooklyn, New York papers had this to say of one of the horses of the Duttons Society's Equestrian act after the animal's death on the Orpheum stage in that city recently.

"This is the tale of a horse whose courage was supreme, though he never was on a battlefield. He lived and died an actor, a cheerful performer to the end. He was a big, white fellow, the equine star of the Dutton Troupe, famous in the circus ring and in vaudeville. His last appearance was at the Orpheum Theatre, Brooklyn.

"Before the act, he dropped his head a little. One of the Misses Dutton patted his neck and asked him if he was feeling poorly. He bravely raised his head at this and as the cue music sounded he trotted into the state arena.

"Not once did he falter. The girls bounded on his back unerringly. A dog who frisked in semi-circles between his feet had no fear. The dog knew his big play fellow would be careful and not step on him.

"James Dutton observed the special care the white horse seemed to be taking to be exactly where he was expected to be. He patted this intelligent actor affectionately and the white horse in return gently touched his muzzle to his owner's ear as if to say: 'You may depend on me.'

"The finish of the act came. Three

times the curtain ascended. Like the others the horse looked happily toward the audience and bowed his appreciation of the applause.

"The curtain descended for the last time. The Dutton girls, in distress, turned their heads as the white horse with one long final breath, stretched himself in the center of the stage circus ring. James Dutton burst into tears as he fell to his knees and took in his arms the horse's neck, for the big white fellow was dead."



The Riding Duttons.

The following editorial regarding the life of Mr. Tom Thumb was published in the *Ohio State Journal*, Columbus, November 28: "When the middle-aged men of today were boys, the greatest holiday of the year was the date when Barnum and his circus came to town. There were circus men before Barnum and there have been many since, but Barnum supplied the basis of comparison for all circus attractions, as he did for all circus advertising. He may have said there was a sucker born every minute, but no matter who was author of that oft-quoted observation, Barnum planned his affairs on that bit of wisdom. He went out each year to harvest the bunch that had come. But no circus man ever gave more of novelty and entertainment for the money than old Barnum. Even gray hairs have not availed to dim the pleasant memories of thousands when they hear the name of Barnum mentioned. He was the joy producer of his day for the men and the boys.

"Barnum brought out General and Mrs. Tom Thumb, the most celebrated couple of Lilliputians; the country has ever seen. For years they were one of the big features of the Barnum aggregation. Mrs. Thumb died a few weeks ago, that fact calling her to the attention of the public after many years of peaceful retirement. She was 77 years of age and had been happily situated, the Barnum engagement netting her a fortune. There are plenty of men all over Ohio who will recall this dainty little doll baby woman in her pretentious court dress and train, as she walked about on an elevated stand before the people who had given up their coin to see her."

It was about half a century ago that the famous Tom Thumb and his wife visited Janesville under the management of P. T. Barnum. They made a parade in this city in a small carriage drawn by two tiny ponies and at that time were one of the great attractions of the day.

I received the following clipping from a Florida paper sent to me by my nephew a few days ago.

"Owing to the thoughtfulness of Dr. H. F. Watt, the generosity of J. G. Keller, manager, and Charles Sparks, owner of Sparks shows and the Johnnyonthepotness of T. M. Kilgore of the Ocala Iron Works, the teachers and scholars of the industrial school saw the circus today.

"It is possible that the showmen would have let the girls in anyhow, as they are always generous, but it seems like Dr. Watt has a string tied to all circuses. One of his uncles was treasurer for years to the Forepaugh's great show and was so highly thought of by the showmen that goodwill for him extends among all showmen of America, so when Dr. Watt told Mr. Sparks who he was, he was bidden to come himself and bring the whole college if he had it.

"Mr. Kilgore came in by immediately procuring the big truck from the Ocala Iron Works and providing transportation for the girls. The naval men, active or ex, are always prompt.

"So the girls and their teachers all went and had a happy afternoon and report to their friends that Sparks shows are all to the merry."

January 3, 1920

While Adam Forepaugh was one of the thrifty men of his day and piled up millions in the circus business, Adam, Jr. was much different from the father. While he was a hard worker and was always on the job, he knew but little about the value of money, which, at times, seemed to worry the father. One time, in particular, after the afternoon show was over, the father came to the ticket wagon and I could see in a minute that he was much worried over something. Immediately upon entering the ticket wagon he jabbed his big hickory cane down on the floor and said: "Dave, I want to know if you value your position here. If you do and expect to stay here with me and handle my money, you must quit giving my boy so much money. From now on I forbid you to give him a dollar without an order from me. I want you to understand that I own this show and I propose to run it. That's all I have to say and you remember what I've told you."

He walked back into the show and the "kid," as we called him around the show, came bounding into the side door of the ticket wagon and as he always called me boss, said:

"Boss, I want some money."

"Nothing doing, kid," I said. "I've just had orders from your father not to give you a dollar without an order from him."

"Is that so?" said the kid. "I want to tell you something. You give me money when I want it and as much as I want, or I will ruin the show and get a sledgehammer and break into the safe you've got in the wagon."

"Well," said I, "kid, if it's come to that, I guess I'd better give you some. How much do you want?"

"I want \$500," he said.

I opened the safe and handed him \$500.

"Thank you, boss," he said, and in a second he was gone.

In less than 10 minutes the father came up again and asked if I'd seen anything of his "Addie" lately.

"Yes," said I, "very lately."

"Was he out here?" asked the father.

When I told him that he had been, he wanted to know what he wanted.

"Well," said I, "he never comes here to visit. It is always a matter of busi-

ness when he comes to the ticket wagon."

"Did he want money?" asked the father.

"Yes," said I, "that is just what he wanted."

"Did you give it to him?"

"Yes, governor, I gave it to him."

"How much did you give him?"

"Five hundred," said I.

The old gentleman looked at me a second and said: "Well, Dave, he is the hardest boy to get rid of that I have ever seen when he wants money, for he well knows that if he wants it, I have it to give to him."

This was the last time that he ever gave the such orders. While the young man was what you might call a spendthrift, he was the hardest worker around the show, both winter and summer and was the greatest animal trainer in the world in his day. At one time when his father had trouble with the performers and they all threatened to go on a strike, he went back in the dressing room, stepped up on one of the big elephant tubs and addressing everyone in the dressing room said:

"I want you all to understand when you're not satisfied here, you can go to the ticket wagon and get your money and look for another job and I want you to understand that if everyone of you quit, give me my 'Addie,' the elephants and the band and I'll give the show."

This was pretty near right, for the young man was an all-around performer and worked all the trained animals in the ring at every afternoon and evening performance.

One year, when we took in the west, young Forepaugh went into a large herd of broncos and picked out 16 that looked good to him and shipped them to Philadelphia to the winter quarters. When the show closed in the fall, he took them in hand and out of the 16 he got 12 of the best performing horses that I ever looked at. When the time came to do their act, he would line them up in a row in the ring and, calling them one after another by their name, they would come forward and do their act without making a mistake. In fact, he trained them to do almost anything but talk.

It was seldom that you would find

a young man who was what you might call a spendthrift who was such a worker; always on the job and could do almost anything around the show. Whenever the father would talk to me about his spending too much money I would always take the "kid's" part and tell the father that while he did spend a lot of money, taking it all around, he was unquestionably the greatest man in the business. It was my taking the part of the boy and being as steady in my work as the boy was in his that kept me in the position up until the time the old showman died. I'll venture to say that if he had lived up to this time, the kid and I would still be with the show.

The widow, who is still living, never forgets to remind us when Christmas comes.

January 10, 1920

A few days ago I met an old friend who was with the Burr Robbins show my first season which was 41 years ago. This was the season when we took in the far west.

He said: "Dave, do you recollect how through Kansas and Nebraska we crossed and recrossed the old trails which were used by thousands crossing the plains on their way to the gold fields in California? How little we thought of it at the time, for many of our roads were simply laid out in an early day across the prairies, and little did we know in those days whether we were getting the short cut or along one to the next town. Many times during the night we would stop at a dugout and wake up the occupants to find out whether we were on the right trail as there were no fences."

One night I remember in a 36-mile drive we passed only one frame house, but possibly 50 dugouts. Another night when we called a man from his dugout and asked him how far it was to Davis City, he answered that they call it 14 miles. Then I said, "Are those Missouri miles?" and he said, "I guess they must be Nebraska miles and possibly they guess at it."

I can't recall today more than 6 of the 150 people with the show that year that are still living. One man by the name of Cash Williams, who at that time was playing in Johnny Smith's band, is located in Janesville

and is night clerk at the Grand Hotel.

Mrs. Burr Robbins, her son and daughter are still living in Chicago, but Burr Robbins died several years ago.

With Rhoda Royal Show

Fred Collier, a former Janesville boy, and his wife, formerly Miss Rose Dixon, of this city are in Florida at present with the Rhoda Royal show.

As already announced in the *Billboard*, the Rhoda Royal show closed at Plant City, Florida on account of the coal situation.

Arrangements had been made by Dan France, general agent, whereby the show could have continued a few days longer, but rather than do this under drastic conditions, the temporary closing was decided upon. A few days later complete arrangements had been made by Rhoda Royal and his representatives to make a tour of the entire east coast of Florida by boat. Three large barges, together with a separate tug for each, were chartered for the trip. Delco light plants were installed on each barge, and the necessary sleeping accommodations were given attention. The wagons are loaded with the equip-

Sellsville as pictured on an 1882 Sells Bros. poster. Cincinnati Art Museum collection.



The Big Show winter quarters in Bridgeport, Connecticut.

ment on the boats as on a flat car. Everything has been systematized as far as possible and a long, pleasant and profitable trip is anticipated. A. T. Clark, who has been assistant to Dan France the last half of the season, is in charge of the advance, Mr. France having gone north on business matters pertaining to next season's early opening.

The Royal show opened May 25 at Memphis, Tennessee and confined the season's entire route in the southern states east of the Mississippi. Much opposition was encountered with the larger shows. Irrespective of this, the show's destinies were ably directed by Dan France. Extensive preparations have already gone forward to next season's tour, and much property has been

thus far accumulated, which is evidence that the show will be enlarged for the coming season.

Struck by Auto

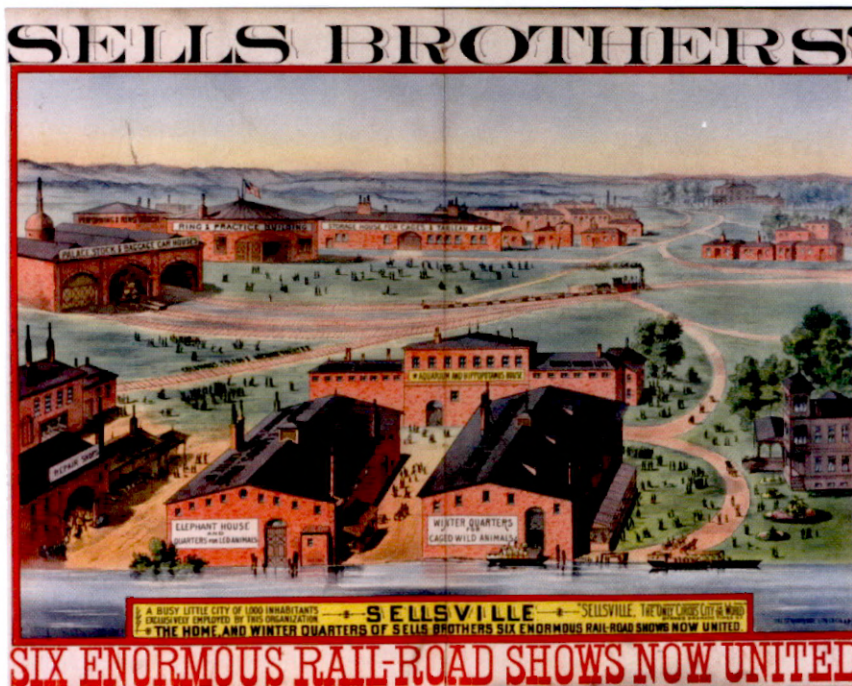
Alex Lowande, one of the best known circus men in the country, has recovered from an accident when he was struck down by an automobile in New York City, receiving many scalp wounds and fracturing his hip. Lowande was with the Forepaugh shows in the late '80's when I also was with the show. His sister, Julia, was the star bareback rider for the show.

The sixth annual banquet and ball of the Showmen's League of America will undoubtedly excel all previous affairs, wonderful, as these have been, ever given by the league. Plans are now underway that will give this banquet and ball a national significance and place the Showmen's League in the public eye from coast to coast and from the gulf to the lakes. These plans cannot be divulged at this time but the chairman, Edward P. Neumann, assures us that they have now reached a point where he can positively state that the greatest surprise, and the most pleasant of the entire year, will be given the show folk who are fortunate enough to be present on the evening of February 18 at the Gold Room of the Congress Hotel.

Owing to the increased cost of everything, the price of tickets this year will be \$10 per plate, but judging from the advance order for tickets, this price will not affect the sale, and it would not be surprising if the attendance this year would be larger than in previous years.

January 17, 1920

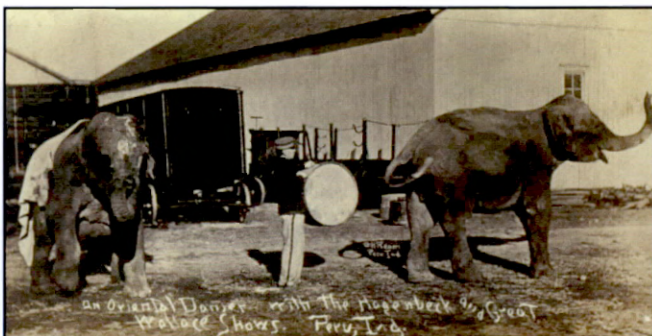
Perhaps the winter quarters of the



different shows, and I have visited all of them at different times, would make interesting reading, especially those of 20 years ago.

At that time I think the winter quarters of the Adam Forepaugh show were the most expensive of any. They occupied an entire block, a solid red brick structure with railroad tracks running in so that when the show closed, all the cars went under cover. They were built with the idea that they might some day be turned into flats. For many years Adam Forepaugh built all his own cages and cars in his winter quarters where he employed about 70 people.

The next high class winter quarters were those of the Barnum show in Bridgeport, Connecticut. It was there that the Barnum show had made its home for more than half a century. At present, it is occupied by the Ringling and Barnum & Bailey shows.



The Hagenbeck-Wallace winter quarters in Peru, Indiana.

long since, with the exception of the ones at Bridgeport.

Baraboo Quarters Closed

The original quarters of the Ringling show at Baraboo have been closed for some years. It is hardly likely that they will ever be opened again as the winter quarters of the great Ringling show. It was in '73 that Burr Robbins wandered into Janesville late in the fall where he took up his winter quarters, finding



Ringling Bros. Horses, Baraboo, Wis.

The Ringling Bros. quarters on Water Street in Baraboo, Wisconsin.

Sells Brothers winter quarters were in the suburbs of Columbus, Ohio. They were built with the idea of housing the entire show. It was known for many years as Sellsville.

Coming west the next one in line was at Peru, Indiana, the winter quarters of the Hagenbeck-Wallace shows for more than 25 years. The old Van Amburgh show made its quarters at Connersville, Indiana. All these have passed out of existence

shelter for his horses on the fairgrounds and using the old stone barn in the rear of the city hall for his animal house. The following spring he purchased a farm of 110 acres in Spring Brook, known as the Doty farm, where he erected building suitable for his show which he occupied for that purpose up until late in the '80's.

Word was received a few days ago from the Al G. Barnes show, which is wintering at Phoenix, Arizona that the opening date would be the first week in March, about a month earlier than they usually start on the

road. The great Ringling and Bar-num shows will open in Madison Square Garden, New York, about the middle of March, for a run of at least six weeks.

Sanford is Criticized

A few days ago I received a clipping from a newspaper published in Sanford, Florida which the sender said he thought might interest the readers of the *Side Lights on the Circus*.

It follows: "Here and there throughout the country may be found towns whose officials are so short-sighted, or dominated by the retrogressive element to such an extent that they can see nothing good in anything which comes under the head of amusement. *The Herald*, a Sanford (Florida) newspaper, paid its compliment in vigorous terms to that sort of town in an editorial on the position Sanford has taken of barring most stringent regulations.

"The place that shuts its gates on amusements may as well shut up shop and quit business," says *The Herald*, 'and if Sanford ever expects to wake up and get people here, Sanford will have to get away from those ancient ideas of building a fence around the town to keep people at home, and to keep the money here. You are driving people and business away from your own town to other towns. You are afraid to go to a circus in your town, but you will spend your money to go to one in Orlando.'

"The average, fair-minded person will heartily agree with the editor of *The Herald*. Shutting out amusements drives people and business away from town. Does a circus pay. Ask the businessmen of any progressive city or town where circuses play. They will tell you that the circus is a good investment for a town--that any clean amusement is an asset and should be encouraged.

"Building a fence around the town to keep the shows out has not kept the people at home,' continues *The Herald* editorial, 'and many of those same people here, who are the loudest in their protestations against a circus coming to Sanford -- or a carnival or anything else of this nature

are the first ones on the show grounds at Orlando or Jacksonville or Tampa, or any other city where such an aggregation pitches its tents. This paper contends, and always has contended, that these amusements, when they are first class and clean, are a good thing for the town. We believe in amusements of all kinds that are good, clean sport, and we say right now that unless Sanford opens up and goes after amusement of this kind, the town is losing a bunch of good advertisement and a bunch of good business."

Ringling Buys Line

John Ringling has bought the holdings of the Eastland, Wichita Falls and Gulf Line and is making preparations for material extensions of the line. The sale of the railroad was completed at a meeting of stockholders and citizens of Eastland at Dallas, Tuesday, December 30. Mr. Ringling announced that he would change the name of the road to the Ringling, Eastland & Gulf Railway and would complete the roadbed to Wayland from Eastland within ninety days. General offices and shops for the line will be established at Eastland and trains will be running within a short time, it was announced.

February 4, 1920

A few days ago I chanced to be visiting in the corridor of the hotel with an old man who was traveling for a wholesale house in Philadelphia. When I told him that I had spent some time every spring and fall for several years in that city, he naturally became curious to know what my business was. When I told him that I had been with the Adam Forepaugh show for several years, in fact up until the time the owner died, the first question he asked me was, "Were you there at the time of the \$10,000 beauty contest when the show opened in April 1882 [1881]." I said I was. He said that he never would forget Louise Montague, the \$10,000 beauty. He was quite a young man at that time and was working for the same house for which he is now traveling.

One evening he took in the show and made up his mind that he would

have to visit with the famous beauty if it was possible at all, that he might tell the boys in the store the next day, that he had a visit with her. He said that he managed to get a visit with her for a few minutes, and she made a great impression on him and gave him her card which he showed proudly to the boys in the store the next day. While he had a beautiful face, form and wardrobe, it was her disposition that attracted him most.

Little did he think at that time that some 28 [39] years later he would have a visit with the man who sold him his ticket that night of the show. While there were dozens of speculators selling tickets on the outside, he said that he was afraid to buy from them and finally crowded his way to the ticket wagon where it seemed thousands were clamoring for tickets, but he knew that if he got his ticket here, all would be well. I recollect well that a man made the announcement from the ring in the show that more than 5000 had been turned away. This was my first season with the big show. I, too, was pleased when they sent me word to close down the wagon, because there was no more room inside.

Louise Montague.
Pfening Archives.

The show came west that season and opened on the lake front in Chicago for two weeks, and while we held the people at the opening matinee, we never held them after that until the night show of the closing day. It was there that Louise Montague gave a banquet to newspapermen at Kingsley's Restaurant which was the finest in the city at that time. Louise had an unlimited expense account and naturally when the bill of \$720 was sent to the wagon, I paid it and said nothing. But some two weeks later, when I checked up with Mr. Forepaugh for the two weeks in Chicago, Mr. Forepaugh let a holler out of him that could be heard a

block away and said that he would see that the girl did not give another banquet of that kind as long as she was with the show. I told him that I thought that would be the cheapest advertisement which the show could have, for it was copied in all papers through the west where we were going and would do thousands of dollars of good. This proved to be true, for the show, that season, cleared close to three quarters of a million dollars. Many a time during the later part of the season, the old showman would say that he believed Louise was all right.

In the last issue of the *Saturday Evening Post* appeared an interesting letter written by an old friend of mine, George Conklin, who for many years was the boss animal man with the show known as the Poge O'Brien circus and menagerie. My first year in the business with Burr Robbins I traveled with his brother, Pete Conklin, whose home was in St. Louis. Pete was one of the famous singing downs of that time. Both Pete and George are still living in the east and must be close to 75 years of age.

I had a letter last week from a Janesville boy, Fred Collier, born and raised in this city and who has been connected with different shows for years. At present, he and his wife, Rose Collier, are with the Rhoda Royal circus which is touring the east coast of Florida. They have been doing a wonderful business all winter. Mr. Collier said while

the closing date had not been announced as yet, he thought they would close possibly in two or three weeks and that both he and his wife would return to Janesville for a short visit. Fred Collier is the equestrian director and performs with several high class horses. His wife works the statuary horses and drives two or three performing horses. The show, he said, would be reorganized in a few weeks and start out again for a long season, principally through the east during the summer.



From the Webmaster—www.circushistory.org

A Huge Thank You to William L. Slout and Stuart Thayer!

The contributions to the CHS website from these two eminent circus historians are monumental! Bill Slout contributed his *Olympians of the Sawdust Circle*, a bibliographical dictionary of the 19th century circus; *A Clown's Log*, early 1800s circus; and *Burnt Cork & Tambourines*, a directory of American Minstrelsy. Stuart Thayer contributed his *American Circus Anthology, Essays of the Early Years* - a compilation of his articles previously published in *Bandwagon*.

Members and others are encouraged to visit the online CHS Discussion and Message Board and use their knowledge and expertise to answer the many questions posted there. - Judy Griffin, webmaster.

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